



Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal

Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Phase 2
Qualitative Field Monitoring: February and March 2016



The Asia Foundation



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
श्रीस मरभर वरस मरयो एमररर

DEMOCRACY
RESOURCE CENTER

Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal

Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Phase 2
Qualitative Field Monitoring: February and March 2016



The Asia Foundation



UKaid
from the British people



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
श्रीमन्तु सरकार विकास सहायता एगरीसि

**DEMOCRACY
RESOURCE CENTER**

July 2016

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our programs address critical issues affecting Asia in the 21st century—governance and law, economic development, women’s empowerment, environment, and regional cooperation. In addition, our Books for Asia and professional exchange programs are among the ways we encourage Asia’s continued development as a peaceful, just, and thriving region of the world. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.

Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Phase 2

Qualitative Field Monitoring: February and March 2016

© The Asia Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without written permission from The Asia Foundation



The Asia Foundation

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

The project is funded by UK aid through the UK government and the Swiss Development Cooperation.
The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the UK or the Swiss government’s official policies.

Cover photo: Amanda Gurung, Alok Pokhare
Design: Deddeaw Laosinchai

PREFACE

In June 2015, The Asia Foundation began a longitudinal series of studies that seek to provide insights into the effectiveness of aid delivery and its impact on recovery in the aftermath of the disastrous earthquakes of April-May 2015 in Nepal. The studies track changes over time through a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess and understand how local contextual factors interact with state and non-state provision of aid. In doing so, the series go beyond damage assessments that have tended to focus on the quantification of impacts and costs. They focus also on social relations, cooperation and conflict, politics and leadership, and how they, with current aid efforts, shape the coping strategies of those affected. Combined with analysis of shifts in government structure and policy over the course of the series, the studies provide valid and reliable data on the direction and magnitude of public sentiment about state performance. They also enable a sharper focus and more precise placement of recovery/reconstruction goods and services.

Field data collection for the first study was completed two months after the quakes, with reports on findings from in-depth fieldwork and from a large representative household survey released in parallel. At the time, the Nepali government had completed a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment and successfully organized a donors' conference to help determine the overall level of official development assistance and government funds needed to recover from the disaster. Our first study affirmed the magnitude of the earthquakes' impacts. Housing destruction was widespread in highly impacted districts. In many wards in medium and lower impact districts, levels of destruction were higher than aggregated district level data revealed. The study also noted some crucial gaps in aid distribution. Many in highly impacted wards in medium impact districts missed out. There were vast differences across districts on how initial damage assessments were done

and how it was determined who was eligible for a beneficiary card.

The second round of research, the findings of which we report here, involved fieldwork in February and March 2016, almost one year on from the earthquakes. The Nepali government established a National Reconstruction Authority early this year and commissioned the development of a framework for recovery and reconstruction over the short, medium, and longer terms. Around the same time, violent protests surrounding the promulgation of the new constitution, and a debilitating five-month blockade along the Nepal-India border, had petered out. Findings from the second round of research thus provide a valuable snapshot of Nepali state performance over the course of a year of political turmoil as well as a substantive baseline that will allow for a future assessment of the NRA's performance.

Among the many interesting findings of the second study, the following are emblematic:

- Okhaldhunga district needs attention; only two percent of people in this crisis hit district received food aid in this round;
- Borrowing has risen with the number of borrowers doubling and average loan size increasing by over 400 percent in severely hit districts; there is great risk of a debt trap for the most vulnerable;
- There is a need to focus livelihood support on farming which is the main source of income of most people and which is recovering slower than other livelihoods; and
- Eighty percent of survivors in severely hit districts are still in contemporary shelter.

The third and fourth studies in the series are scheduled for September-October 2016 and March-April of 2017.

We thank our research partners (Democracy Resource Center Nepal and Interdisciplinary Analysts), our donor partners (UK Department for International Development and Embassy of Switzerland), and

Nepali government officials in the NRA and the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development for their support.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Varughese'.

George Varughese, Ph.D.
Nepal Country Representative
The Asia Foundation

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Barron'.

Patrick Barron, Ph.D.
Regional Director for Conflict & Development
The Asia Foundation

Acknowledgements

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) and The Asia Foundation (TAF) wish to express their appreciation to the many people who made this report possible, particularly the people in Gorkha, Okhaldhunga, Sindhupalchowk, Syangja, Ramechhap, and Solukhumbu districts who took the time to participate in the research.

The study was conducted by a team of researchers from DRCN led by Sudip Pokharel. The research was coordinated by Apurba Khatiwada of DRCN. Analysis of the data was done by Amy Leigh Johnson, Anubhav Ajeet, Apurba Khatiwada, Shekhar Parajulee, and Sudip Pokharel, who co-authored the report with TAF contributors Mark Koenig, Sasiwan Chingchit, and Lena Michaels. Patrick Barron provided guidance and inputs throughout.

Special thanks goes to the team of researchers for their dedication in the field: the lead researchers Anubhav Ajeet, Chiran Manandhar, Nayan Pokhrel, Shekhar Parajulee, Subhash Lamichhane and Ujjwal Prasai and the researchers Alok Pokharel, Amanda Gurung, Anurag Devkota, Binu Sharma, Dipti Sherchan, Ishwari Bhattarai, Janak Raj Sapkota, Prapti Adhikari,

Punam Limbu, Shikha Kiran Yadav, Smita Magar, and Tanka Gurung. Special thanks also goes to Iona Liddell, Sailesh Pandit, and Shraddha Pokharel for their valuable assistance during the preparation of the report.

A number of people provided useful inputs at various stages, including in the formation of the questionnaires, finalization of the sampling strategy, and analysis of the data. They include George Varughese, James Sharrock, and our graphic designer, Deddeaw Laosinchai.

The project is funded by UK aid through the UK government and the Swiss Development Cooperation, with support from the UK Department for International Development's Programme Partnership Arrangement with The Asia Foundation. Andy Murray (UK DFID) and Pia Haenni (SDC) have managed the project from the donor side, and have produced useful inputs at every stage.

The views here do not necessarily reflect the UK or the Swiss government's official policies.

Executive Summary

The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) prepared by the Government of Nepal in August 2015 estimated that the lives of eight million people, almost one-third of the population of Nepal, were impacted by the earthquake of 25 April 2015 and the subsequent aftershocks. For the Government of Nepal and its partners to develop and implement effective recovery programs, there is a need to understand how communities are coping with the challenges that have emerged, and are experiencing the efforts at relief and reconstruction in different affected areas. This report, produced by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) and The Asia Foundation, provides data and analysis to inform stakeholders about how assistance is interacting with local-level conditions, and the impacts on community and individual recovery. It compliments a report based on quantitative data that has been published in parallel.

The report details findings from the second phase of a ward-level longitudinal qualitative field research study. The methodology combines participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussion methods. The first phase of fieldwork was completed in June 2015. This report focuses on findings from field visits that took place between February 20 and March 8, 2016. Six teams of DRCN researchers conducted research in a total of 36 wards across six earthquake affected districts: Gorkha, Sindhupalchowk, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, Solukumbu, and Syangja.

Aid delivery and effectiveness.

Aid since the 2015 monsoon (June 2015) was found to have focused on non-emergency relief such as small cash grants and trainings. Although rebuilding of houses was widely cited as the most urgent need, other than a few exceptional individual cases, work on reconstruction in all the districts studied had not started. This was mainly attributed to the delay in establishing the National Reconstruction Authority, unclear reconstruction related policies and procedures, and national

level political distractions. Other high priority needs identified by respondents were geological assessments in areas with high risks of landslides, relocation of temporarily and permanently displaced people, and attention to water and sanitation issues.

Challenges facing those providing assistance for recovery and reconstruction include weak communication efforts and contentious damage assessments. Communication was observed to be limited between various levels of government, with information on reconstruction policies clearly not reaching the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and wards, and information on local needs and priorities not being effectively passed up to the district and central government actors. In recent months, formal government engagement at the local level on recovery has largely been limited to carrying out assessments of housing damage, a process which has been heavily contested due to problematic categorizations and procedural inconsistencies. Complaints are stemming from perceived unfairness, both in terms of undeserving households being included on beneficiary lists, as well as the exclusion of affected households. These problems have been further aggravated by the absence of a formal redress system and the ad hoc nature of efforts to address any complaints received.

Politics and leadership.

The dynamics between political parties and local officials have largely remained the same since the earthquakes, with local officials continuing to consult political parties in order to carry out their responsibilities. Since political parties continue to be involved in local governance at the district and VDC levels, they also exert some influence over local level decisions on relief distribution, even as the activities of formal coordination bodies have waned in recent months with decreased aid flows. Generally, however, political parties have not independently conducted earthquake related rallies, political meetings, or reconstruction efforts. Only isolated incidents of conflict between

political parties or of the politicization of relief work have been reported at this point, but the role of political parties, in particular in damage assessments, was considered to be contentious in many locations. Local party leaders were seen by many as having influenced assessments by pressurizing local officials to exaggerate or understate reports of damages to homes.

Challenges to existing party leadership, or signs of significant shifts in support for the major parties, were not found. Potential leadership showed by various non-political actors such as Ward Citizen Forum coordinators, teachers, business people, and philanthropists was noted as important for the recovery process, but has not resulted in any changed in local political dynamics or influence to date.

Social relations and conflict.

Most communities maintained good social relations after the earthquakes, and this trend largely continued after the monsoon. Across the research districts, most wards reported good social relations post-earthquake. Despite this general trend, in six out of 36 wards visited residents did indicate that social relations had shown signs of deterioration, and another three reported significant tensions or disputes. But in no communities had disagreements, complaints, or real or perceived discrimination escalated to the level of open conflict. In addition, no evidence of increases in crime was found, despite some unconfirmed reports of increases in sexual and gender-based violence.

In those few places where respondents reported that social relations had worsened or tensions had emerged, it was more likely that the wards were in crisis hit or severely hit districts. Causes included tension over displacement and the temporary relocation of affected families, perceived unfairness in aid distribution, and, in one case, water sources. Resentment over perceived and actual discrimination was often related to caste and ethnicity, but in very few cases were these complaints linked to any public disputes, with no cases of violence found.

Protection and vulnerability.

The monsoon and winter seasons presented a series of physical and psychological hardships for earthquake-affected persons who were forced to live

through these seasons in temporary shelters or damaged houses. Physical hardships, such as illness and exposure, were compounded by lingering psychological distress related to the earthquakes, personal losses, current living conditions, livelihood uncertainties, and recurring aftershocks. In the 36 wards visited in this research, women, children, the elderly, the displaced, and the economically disadvantaged were most frequently cited as the population groups most vulnerable to the challenges of living in temporary shelters and damaged homes during the monsoon and winter. No human rights abuses were reported by security officials or ward respondents, but there were concerns expressed about possible increases in incidences of alcoholism, gender-based and domestic violence, and suicide, especially in severely hit and crisis hit regions.

Economy and livelihoods.

The earthquakes' impact on household livelihoods depended on the scale of damage in the particular locality. Field research clearly found that the resumption of livelihoods and recovery of the economy was quicker in the low-impact districts compared with those that were critically hit. But after the monsoon almost all economic sectors were showing signs of recovery and a return to normal activities. Most farmers have restarted agricultural activities since the monsoon, in many cases before, even in the most severely affected areas of Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk. In many ways businesses were more disrupted in highly affected areas and suffered substantial economic losses. Speed of recovery has been dependent on the specific damage suffered, but in general the fieldwork found signs of recovery. The clear exception has been the tourism industry, which was still struggling and will require an increase in the number of visitors to pre-earthquake levels to recover entirely.

The other critical story regarding the economic impact of the earthquakes on households is that of debt and borrowing. Field research suggests that the rate and volume of borrowing money increased after the monsoon, a trend which is expected to increase once rebuilding starts in earnest. The sale of assets remained low, actually decreasing after the monsoon, and was limited to the selling of livestock. The rate of out-migration largely remained unaffected in the locations visited and, according to interviews in the field, the volume of remittances remained constant after the monsoon, having increased after the earthquakes.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------|---|
| APM | All Party Mechanism |
| CBS | Central Bureau of Statistics |
| CDO | Chief District Officer |
| CPN-UML | Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) |
| DCC | District Coordination Committee |
| DDRC | District Disaster Relief Committee |
| DLSA | District Lead Support Agencies |
| DRCN | Democracy Resource Center Nepal |
| INGO | International non-governmental organization |
| IRM | Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring for Accountability in Post-Earthquake Nepal project |
| JICA | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| LDO | Local Development Officer |
| MoFALD | Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development |
| MoUD | Ministry of Urban Development |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NA | Nepal Army |
| NC | Nepali Congress |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| NPR | Nepali Rupees |
| NRA | National Reconstruction Authority |
| PDNA | Post-Disaster Needs Assessment |
| PDRF | Post-Disaster Relief Framework |
| RDC | Relief Distribution Committee |
| RPP | Rastriya Prajatantra Party |
| UCPN (M) | Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Emergency Fund |
| UN OCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| VDC | Village Development Committee |
| WCF | Ward Citizen Forum |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| PREFACE | III |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | V |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | VI |
| LIST OF ACRONYMS | VIII |
| LIST OF FIGURES | X |
| LIST OF TABLES | X |
| LIST OF CASE STUDIES | XI |
| CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1. Background | 1 |
| 1.2. Focus Areas | 3 |
| 1.3. Methods | 4 |
| 1.4. Structure of the Report | 6 |
| CHAPTER 2. DEVELOPMENTS SINCE IRM-1 | 7 |
| 2.1. Current Status of Reconstruction | 7 |
| 2.2. National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) | 9 |
| 2.3. Economic Blockade and Fuel Crisis | 10 |
| CHAPTER 3. AID DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS | 11 |
| 3.1. Survivor needs and the delivery of aid: 6-12 months after the earthquakes | 12 |
| 3.2. Patterns and targeting by government and non-government aid providers | 19 |
| 3.3. Coordination of aid | 20 |
| 3.4. Damage assessments | 23 |
| 3.5. Accountability, complaints, and redress | 28 |
| CHAPTER 4. POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP | 31 |
| 4.1. Role of political parties | 32 |
| 4.2. Emergence of new leadership | 38 |
| CHAPTER 5. SOCIAL RELATIONS AND CONFLICT | 39 |
| 5.1. Overall social relations | 40 |
| 5.2. Displacement and relocation: effects on social relations | 43 |
| 5.3. Discrimination and uneven access to relief | 46 |
| 5.4. Resolving disputes | 49 |
| 5.5. Violence, crime, and security | 49 |
| CHAPTER 6. PROTECTION AND VULNERABILITY | 51 |
| 6.1. Living through the monsoon and winter seasons | 52 |
| 6.2. Challenges facing specific vulnerable groups | 55 |
| CHAPTER 7. ECONOMY AND LIVELIHOODS | 61 |
| 7.1. Impacts on sources of livelihood post-monsoon | 62 |
| 7.2. Strategies for coping with financial stress | 68 |
| CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 73 |
| ANNEX A: METHODS | 79 |
| ANNEX B: EARTHQUAKE IMPACTS | 83 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | | |
|--------------------|--|----|
| <i>Figure 2.1:</i> | Reconstruction of damaged infrastructure in wards studied | 9 |
| <i>Figure 3.1:</i> | Needs identified by ward respondents compared against types of aid scheme delivered in those wards | 16 |
| <i>Figure 3.2:</i> | Targeting methods used by aid schemes | 19 |
| <i>Figure 3.3:</i> | Pathways for aid distribution by aid schemes | 20 |
| <i>Figure 4.1:</i> | Aid delivery pathways used by non-governmental organizations | 37 |
| <i>Figure 6.1:</i> | Groups identified as vulnerable populations by ward respondents | 55 |
| <i>Figure 7.1:</i> | Perceived level of impact on common sources of income | 62 |
| <i>Figure 7.2:</i> | Sources of money lending used by households reporting borrowing | 68 |
| <i>Figure 7.3:</i> | Average interest rates charged by lenders | 68 |
| <i>Figure B.1:</i> | Percentage of fully and partially damaged houses by district | 83 |
| <i>Figure B.2:</i> | Numbers of deaths and injured in districts visited | 84 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | | |
|-------------------|---|----|
| <i>Table 1.1:</i> | District level earthquake impact (PDNA) | 5 |
| <i>Table A.1:</i> | Number of respondents by district | 79 |
| <i>Table A.2:</i> | Criteria for VDC/municipality selection | 80 |
| <i>Table A.3:</i> | VDCs visited and ward classification | 82 |

LIST OF CASE STUDIES

| | | |
|------------------------|---|----|
| <i>Case Study 3.1:</i> | Beneficiary card stories | 14 |
| <i>Case Study 3.2:</i> | Indecision due to unclear and delayed government policy | 17 |
| <i>Case Study 3.3:</i> | A controlled and insufficient information regime | 22 |
| <i>Case Study 3.4:</i> | Returning the relief | 27 |
| <i>Case Study 3.5:</i> | Rumors | 27 |
| <i>Case Study 5.1:</i> | Decision not to provide aid to internal migrants causes tensions in Ramechhap | 48 |
| <i>Case Study 6.1:</i> | One family's experience of the psychological impacts of the earthquakes | 54 |
| <i>Case Study 6.2:</i> | Health in temporary shelters | 57 |
| <i>Case Study 6.3:</i> | Poverty and perceived unfairness | 60 |
| <i>Case Study 7.1:</i> | Water crisis in Okhaldhunga | 64 |
| <i>Case Study 7.2:</i> | Trekking loses, masonry gains | 65 |
| <i>Case Study 7.3:</i> | Young entrepreneurs in Syangja start a concrete block factory | 66 |



Photo: Amanda Gurung



Photo: Alok Pokharel

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) prepared by the Government of Nepal in August 2015 estimated that the lives of eight million people, almost one-third of the population of Nepal, had been impacted by the earthquake of 25 April 2015 and the subsequent aftershocks.¹ Over 8,790 people were killed and 22,300 injured across 31 affected districts, out of which 14 were declared severely hit or crisis hit on the basis of the levels of impact. According to PDNA estimates, damages and losses totaled over NPR 355 billion in the social sectors,³ NPR 178 billion in the productive sectors,⁴ and NPR 57 billion in infrastructure.⁵

While the PDNA offers broad analysis of the extent and cost of earthquake damage, it contains limited information and data on how the earthquakes have impacted livelihoods, social cohesion, vulnerability, political relations, and other key topics. In addition, the PDNA cannot offer information on the effectiveness of aid targeting and delivery. The qualitative research

presented here focuses on these areas to help fill the gaps that exist in our understanding of the full social, political and economic impacts of the earthquakes and how the aid response is addressing them.

For the Government of Nepal and its partners to develop and implement programs that respond to the actual needs of the earthquake affected, there is a need to understand how Nepalis in different earthquake impacted regions have coped with the challenges that have emerged, and experienced the various efforts at relief, recovery, and reconstruction to date. As the needs of communities throughout the affected area shift and evolve throughout the recovery process, information will need to be continually updated.

The Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring (IRM) project uses mixed methods to track emerging issues and recovery over time in the earthquake affected zone. This report, produced by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) and The Asia Found-

¹ Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission, Nepal Earthquake 2015: Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (Volume A: Key Findings), Kathmandu 2015. (available at: http://www.npc.gov.np/images/download/PDNA_Volume_A.pdf)

² Ibid.

³ The PDNA includes housing and human settlements, health,

education and cultural heritage within the social sectors.

⁴ The PDNA includes agriculture, irrigation, commerce, industry, tourism and finance within the productive sectors.

⁵ The PDNA includes electricity, communications, community infrastructure, transport, water and sanitation within the infrastructure sectors.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

ation, provides data and analysis on how aid delivery practices, political cultures, social relations, and livelihoods intersect in order to determine the local-level conditions that shape community and individual recovery. It complements a report based on quantitative data that has been published in parallel.⁶ The findings from the two reports will be synthesized into a third report.

The information provided is the second wave of a ward-level longitudinal qualitative field research study. The methodology combines participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussion

methods. The first phase of fieldwork (IRM-1) was completed in June 2015.⁷ This report focuses on findings from the second phase of research, which took place from 20 February to 8 March 2016. Six teams of DRCN researchers conducted research in a total of 36 wards across six earthquake affected districts.

The first wave of the research was concluded eight weeks after the 25 April 2015 earthquake and therefore focused on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the earliest phases of recovery. This second round of research provides information on the challenges of the monsoon and winter seasons, as well as the

⁶ The Asia Foundation and Interdisciplinary Analysts (2016). *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 2 – Quantitative Survey (February and March 2016)*. Kathmandu and Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.

⁷ The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal (2015). *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (June 2015)*. Kathmandu and Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.

medium term recovery efforts that have taken place. This period was a momentous but also tumultuous one for Nepal. The promulgation of the 2015 Nepal Constitution and the ensuing blockade of the Nepal-India border affected the entire country, clearly impacting the progress of recovery efforts. The interaction of nature, politics, economies, and local social relations manifests differently in each ward included in the study; understanding the diverse and context-specific challenges that these factors create in communities across impacted areas is critical to the creation and implementation of meaningful and effective earthquake reconstruction policies and programs.

The first phase of monitoring made a series of recommendations on the basis of research findings and qualitative analysis. It was recommended that relief and recovery efforts should work through government mechanisms: the District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRC) and the Village Development Committee (VDC) Relief Distribution Committees (RDCs). The research recommended improving existing government mechanisms to make them more transparent, ensuring information was more clearly communicated, and providing effective complaint

mechanisms. This included clarifying the damage assessment process and instituting inclusive decision-making processes that prioritize the participation of victims of the earthquakes. The research pointed towards emerging gaps in resettlement plans for the displaced population, inadequate land assessments, and challenges with regard to access to finance and the long-term relief and reconstruction plan. Research also found that while social cohesion and political dynamics had not significantly worsened in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, caution was needed among policymakers and aid agencies about the possible impact of large-scale reconstruction and other relief on social relations and conflict.

In this second round of research (IRM-2) many of the same challenges persist while new concerns are also emerging. While official reconstruction efforts have been slow to start for various reasons, conditions on the ground are constantly evolving and needs changing. This report provides analysis of the last six months of recovery and changes in the environment in the studied areas. It also provides recommendations on how to move forward efficiently and effectively with recovery and reconstruction efforts.

1.2. Focus Areas

The report focuses on five thematic areas, seeking to answer key questions for each:

Aid delivery and effectiveness

How did affected people 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 levels of satisfaction with responses.

Politics and leadership

What was the impact of the disaster and aid effort on the dynamics and leadership of local formal and informal institutions? The report 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 earthquakes 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 earthquakes? The report discusses factors increasing vulnerability and examines which groups are particularly vulnerable.

Economy and livelihoods

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 20 February to 8 March 2016. Researchers visited 36 wards in 18 VDCs/municipalities⁸ in six earthquake-affected districts: Gorkha, Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap, Syangja, Sindhupalchowk, and Solukhumbu (Map 1). 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. In the case of districts that were included in the first phase of the study, researchers spent time in district headquarters to track changes or developments in the dynamics of the aid response.

The research teams used key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation

to gather two kinds of data.⁹ 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 areas. Second, teams provided a descriptive picture of the five research areas through in-depth field research. In the case of districts that were covered in the first phase of the study, the research teams also explained the changes in the five research areas and new emerging trends since the first round of the research. Future rounds of research will take place in the same six districts, allowing these longitudinal comparisons to continue as the recovery process proceeds.



Map 1: Research districts

⁸ The research covered fifteen VDCs and three municipalities. In this report, unless mentioned otherwise, VDCs should be read to include municipalities.

⁹ 459 key informant interviews were conducted including 68 with government officials. 239 individuals participated in focus group discussions. Out of the 698 individuals who participated, 292 were female.

The report focuses on the impact of the earthquakes and the response at the ward level. Sampling of locations was done at three levels—district, VDC, and ward—with the intention of selecting sites which varied in terms of two key factors that were predicted to affect the nature and speed of recovery: (i) the degree of impact of the earthquakes; and (ii) the degree of remoteness.

Districts were selected to vary by level of earthquake damage: three severely hit, one crisis hit, one hit with heavy losses, and one hit district were chosen (Table 1.1). Affected districts were categorized based on the PDNA carried out by the government of Nepal. In order to cover at least one district from each of the PDNA impact categories, which was only released after the first phase of research began, two new districts, Ramechhap and Solukhumbu, were added in place of Dolakha and Makawanpur for the second round of research.

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. Among the 18 VDCs/municipalities that were visited, eight were high impact, seven were medium impact, and three were low impact. Similarly, nine VDCs/municipalities were accessible, seven were remote and two were accessible as well as remote depending on where the affected areas in the VDC were located. Wards were then selected based on information gathered in the VDCs on levels of impact and the location of the wards. In each VDC, teams conducted research in the ward where the VDC hub (center) is located, and then in a second less accessible ward located up to a day's drive or walk away from the VDC hub.

During the analysis stage, wards were classified separately to reflect the significant variance in the 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. A more complete description of the research methodology is provided in Annex A.

Table 1.1: District level earthquake impact (PDNA)

| Severely hit | Crisis hit | Hit with heavy losses | Hit |
|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Ramechhap | Okhaldhunga | Solukhumbu | Syangja |
| Gorkha | | | |
| Sindhupalchowk | | | |

Limitations

Research Locations: The research is a part of the longitudinal study of the impacts of the earthquakes and the changing needs of the victims of the earthquakes. Therefore, in four of the six districts, researchers visited only those VDCs and wards that were part of the first round of the study. Due to early monsoon period, researchers in the first round of the research were not able to visit very remote and inaccessible VDCs and wards. Therefore, remote VDCs for the purpose of this study also include VDCs that

were situated more than half a day's drive or walk from the district headquarters.

Data: Government agencies, including VDC offices and district level agencies, often did not have adequate data on earthquake impact, aid, and the recovery and reconstruction process. Research teams therefore relied on secondary data, key informant interviews, and their general impressions and observations when there was a gap in the availability of data.

1.4. Structure of the Report

The report continues as follows:

Chapter 2 provides an update on recent developments in Nepal that have affected the earthquake recovery process since the last round of research was completed.

Chapter 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, changes in the needs and priorities of the people, changes in the nature of aid and recovery process, and levels of satisfaction with the response.

Chapter 4 focuses on the impact on local *leadership structures and political dynamics* as well as the role of political parties in aid distribution. This chapter also focuses on the role of political parties and other local leaders since the early weeks of relief distribution and the emergence of new leadership at the local level.

Chapter 5 discusses the impact of the earthquakes and the response on *social relations* and identity issues that may lead, or already have led, to *conflict*. This chapter also traces the changes in social relations since the early weeks of relief distribution.

Chapter 6 focuses on *protection* issues and factors that increase *vulnerability* in affected areas, especially for some groups.

Chapter 7 describes the impact on *livelihoods* and the *economy* in the wards visited and discusses the implications this may have for recovery. This chapter also examines the *coping mechanisms* people are using to address their livelihood needs.

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



Chapter 2. Developments since IRM-1

Photo: Alok Pokharel

The past year has presented significant challenges for the people of Nepal as they have struggled to rebuild their livelihoods, homes, and communities damaged by the earthquakes. In the weeks after the disaster, as the monsoon rains began to descend in June 2015, individual citizens, the Government of Nepal, civil society, and the international community overcame extraordinary challenges to distribute relief and temporary shelter for thousands of displaced and homeless persons residing in earthquake-affected regions. The nascent rules and procedures that guided relief distribution by governmental and non-governmental institutions in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes have since been formalized and transformed into a coherent national strategy, embodied in the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). The Nepali legislature formally created the NRA in December 2015, and it was inaugurated in January 2016.¹⁰

The delay in creating the NRA in turn led to delays in reconstruction efforts. These delays, combined with challenges communicating effectively with local earthquake-affected areas and persons and multiple (sometimes conflicting) damage assessments, have meant that policies, plans, and the implications for the earthquake affected are unclear. There is confusion about how recovery and reconstruction will move forward and uncertainty for households trying to make their own decisions. The delays have created challenging conditions for communities that will be detailed in the chapters to follow. But it is first important to provide analysis of the reasons for these delays, as well as review the overall status of reconstruction in the various districts studied.

2.1. Current Status of Reconstruction

The first phase of the IRM research, conducted in June 2015, identified housing reconstruction as the most pressing need of earthquake-affected persons,

after the provision of immediate relief.¹¹ However, it was not until 16 January 2016 that the formal reconstruction process was started with the laying

¹⁰ <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-01-06/nra-members-appointed.html>

¹¹ The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal, Aid

and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (June 2015), pp. 14-17.



Photo: Alok Pokharel

of the foundation stone of a temple in Kathmandu.¹² As of the time of the IRM-2 fieldwork, government support for the reconstruction of private houses had yet to begin. In recent months the NRA has started to sign reconstruction agreements with people who are eligible to receive reconstruction assistance. In many areas, however, the NRA is still to finalize the beneficiary list of the households eligible to receive reconstruction assistance, as the final phase of a third damage assessment by enumerators from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) is still ongoing. Where the assessment has been completed, the NRA still must process the many complaints filed about the veracity of the CBS's damage assessment.

In the absence of state-supported reconstruction, people whose houses were fully damaged by the earthquakes (according to the PDNA's estimate, the number of fully damaged houses is 498,852) have been either forced to live in temporary shelters or start reconstruction on their own. This study found instances

of coordinated reconstruction of damaged houses at the community level with the involvement of NGOs in two districts. Only in Nele VDC in Solukhumbu and Doramba VDC in Ramechhap, coordinated reconstruction was taking place during the field research. According to the CBS, people have rebuilt 31,000 houses in 11 severely hit and crisis hit districts without government assistance.¹³

The state of reconstruction of public infrastructure also reflects this inability to facilitate quick and effective responses to the many needs in affected areas. Besides Sindhupalchowk, where the research team found that 45% of the fully and partially destroyed public infrastructure in the wards visited had been either rebuilt or were in the process of being rebuilt, reconstruction of public infrastructure has been slow. In Ramechhap, only 13% of damaged public infrastructure has been rebuilt, or was in the process of being rebuilt, when the research team visited; in Gorkha, the figure is 15%. In Okhaldhunga, not a single

¹² <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-01-16/rebuilding-campaign-set-to-kick-start-today.html>

¹³ The Kathmandu Post, *Over 31,000 rebuild on their own*, reported

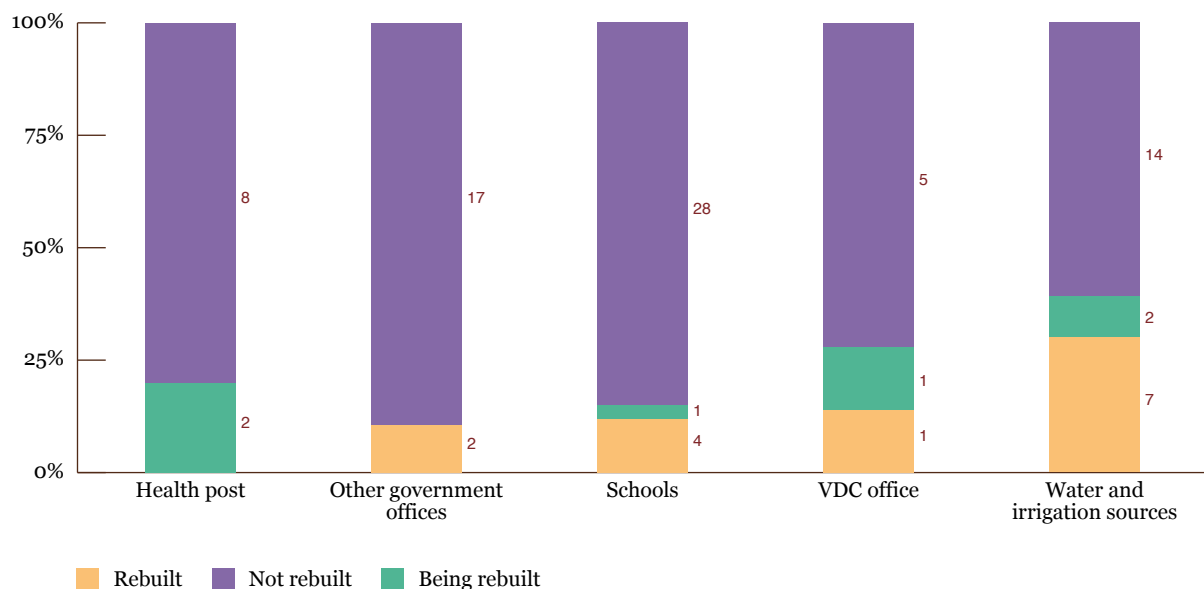
on 18 April 2016. Available at: <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-04-18/over-31000-families-rebuild-on-their-own.html>.

project had started to rebuild public infrastructure in the locations visited at the time of the field research. In Solukhumbu, where there were examples of private reconstruction efforts relating to individual houses, the reconstruction of public infrastructure was taking place at similar levels as in Gorkha and Ramechhap, with just 15% of damaged public infrastructure rebuilt or in the process of being rebuilt. As such, with the exception of Sindhupalchowk, the nature and the state of recovery in the districts visited was uniform with little progress in the reconstruction of public infrastructure.

Beyond those very few households that rebuilt their houses themselves, earthquake-affected persons were forced to spend the monsoon and the winter in

temporary shelters, or were internally displaced, staying with relatives or in rental properties. While most of those affected were able to find shelter on or near their land, many households ended up far from home. While more households have since rebuilt or made some repairs to their houses, the NRA's reconstruction plans remained unimplemented as of the time of the field research, so most affected households were still making temporary arrangements. Similarly, the government is yet to begin a coordinated reconstruction of damaged public and community buildings, including schools and hospitals. Figure 2.1 shows the total number of damaged public infrastructure facilities across all 36 wards studied, as well as the current state of reconstruction and repair.

Figure 2.1: Reconstruction of damaged infrastructure in wards studied



2.2. National Reconstruction Authority (NRA)

The NRA, which is formally responsible for the reconstruction of structures damaged by the earthquakes, was established around eight months after the disaster struck. Differences between the two main coalition partners of the last government, CPN-UML and Nepali Congress, regarding the appointment of the NRA chief prevented the passing of the NRA Act before the promulgation of the Constitution in September 2015. In addition, the priority of the government and the Constituent Assembly, which

was also functioning as the parliament, shifted to the finalization of the Constitution during the summer months of 2015, contributing to the delayed adoption of the NRA Act and the establishment of the NRA.

Since its establishment, the NRA has focused on formulating reconstruction policies, guidelines, and procedures. As of the time of the research, the actual reconstruction of damaged structures had not yet formally begun. So far, the most important policies

that the NRA has created are the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Policy 2016, the Procedure Relating to the Mobilization of NGOs in the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation 2016, and the Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF). The Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Policy 2016, which was approved on 14 February 2016, has sections relating to reconstruction, resettlement, natural disasters' impact mitigation strategy, livelihood protection, access to finance, protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups, and NGOs' and INGOs' involvement in reconstruction. It identifies government assistance, public-private partnerships, community participation, social inclusion, advocacy campaigns on earthquake

risk and other best practices in natural disaster resilience that the NRA is going to employ in the reconstruction of damaged structures.

The PDRF,¹⁴ on the other hand, identifies the recovery objectives of the NRA and also presents initial policy decisions, as well as institutional arrangements for the NRA, including financing and financial management strategies, as well as implementation and monitoring systems. It also identifies sectorial priorities relating to the reconstruction process, and elaborates on the government's five-year reconstruction plan, which was laid out in the Annual Programs and Policies of the Government of Nepal for the year 2016/17.

2.3. Economic Blockade and Fuel Crisis

When the first earthquake struck in April 2015, Nepal was nine years into a post-conflict constitutional transformation that had begun with the overthrowing of the monarchy in April 2006. As a part of this transformation process, and after the failure of a first Constituent Assembly to promulgate a constitution, in 2013 the people of Nepal elected members of the second Constituent Assembly to finalize the country's new constitution, which was expected not only formalize the comprehensive peace accord signed between the state and the Maoists—who had fought against the state in a bloody civil war since 1996—but also transform Nepal into a more inclusive state.

However, the process of finalizing a draft and the eventual promulgation of this constitution on 20 September 2015 was not welcomed by all. Dissatisfaction with elements of the draft shared with the public, such as the demarcation of state boundaries and protection of the rights of marginalized communities, resulted in many groups, including Madhesis who reside in the plains of Nepal, leading a wave of protests in many areas of the country, most intensely in the Terai. Despite this, the government proceeded rapidly to finalize the draft without reaching consensus on several controversial issues, including the issue of boundary demarcation. When the constitution was promulgated in September despite this opposition, it led to violent incidents, and the start of an economic blockade along the Nepal-India border, with likely support from India. This blockade started in September 2015 and did not formally end until February 2016. The blockade of multiple major border crossings resulted in a severe shortage of fuel in the country and the scarcity of some other goods. The shortage of fuel resulted in, among other things, a sharp rise in the price of food, transportation, as well as masonry and building

materials. Key informants across all wards visited during the research complained about the increased costs of reconstruction.

There is, however, no clear direct causal link between the economic blockade (and the ensuing fuel crisis) and the delayed reconstruction process. Indeed, the parliament passed the NRA Act at the end of December 2015—three months into the blockade—and without a fully developed and concrete reconstruction policy or program framed by the Government to guide the NRA's work. Rather than economic crisis brought on by the blockade, the delays can be attributed both to the government's focus on promulgating the constitution, as well as dealing with the national political debates, and the struggles between and within parties that this major change brought on. Whatever the specific cause, it is clear that in February-March 2016 at the time of the field research, the view from local officials and communities was that there was a lack of clear policies, timelines and information that they could build on to plan how they would recover and rebuild.

¹⁴ The Government of Nepal, National Reconstruction Authority, Nepal Earthquake 2015: Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (2016-2020) Kathmandu, May 2016. Available at: <http://nra.gov.np/uploads/docs/wQxngUUy2r160512083450.pdf>

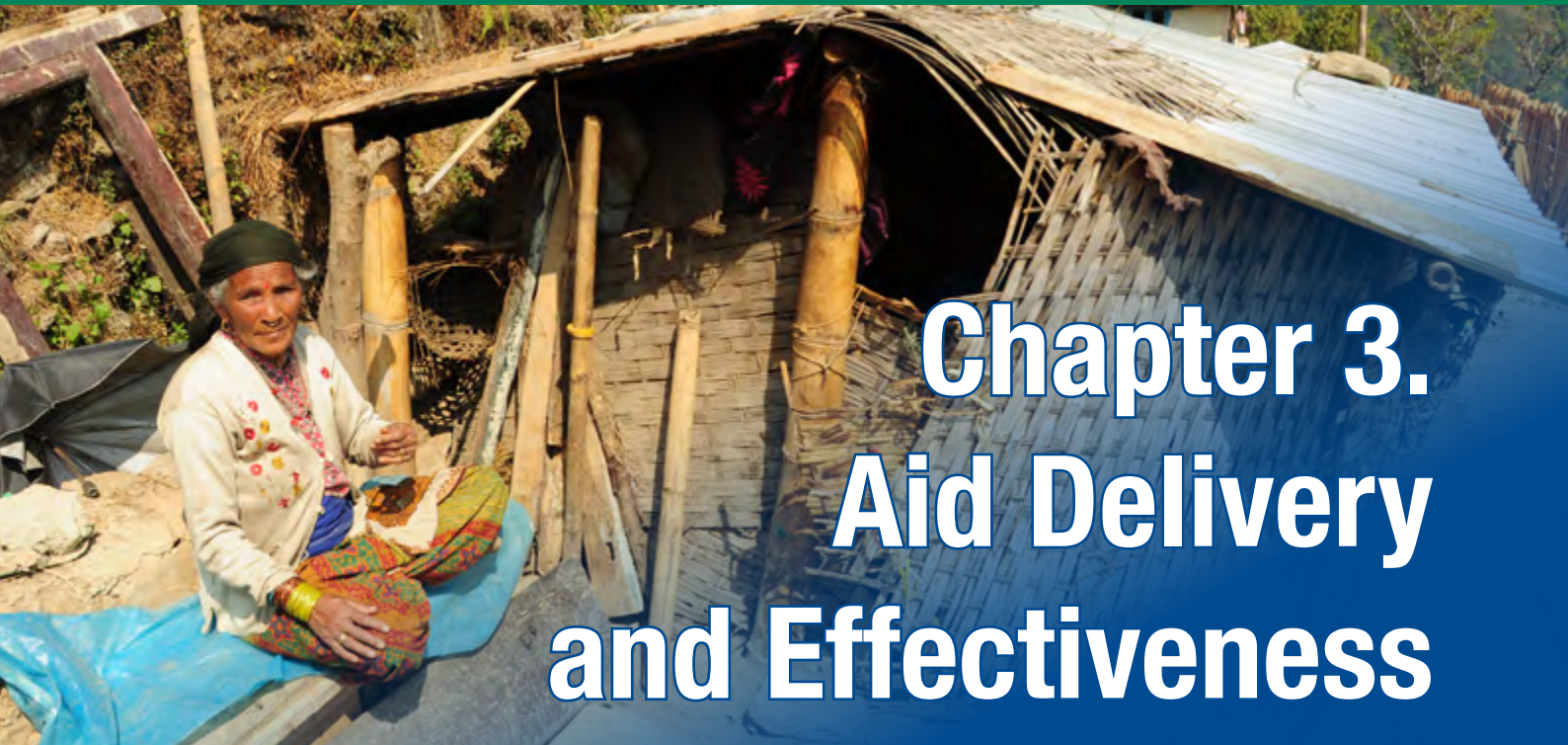


Photo: Alok Pokharel

Chapter 3. Aid Delivery and Effectiveness

- ▶ The most widely cited urgent needs by both community members and local officials were the reconstruction of houses, community infrastructure, associated cash and credit assistance, the rebuilding of water sources, and geological assessments.
- ▶ Aid provided did not always match the needs identified by respondents. During this period, after the end of the emergency relief phase, government aid was mostly focused on emergency shelter and winterization cash assistance. Non-governmental aid was diverse and included preparatory programs for reconstruction, but also trainings, cash for work programs, limited food aid, and support for winter preparations.
- ▶ At the time of field research (February/March 2016), there had been no formal reconstruction activities in the villages. Furthermore, a lack of clear policies and ineffective communication was resulting in rumors and misinformation.
- ▶ Damage assessments were varied in timing, methodology, and standards applied across locations studied; this has resulted in widespread frustration, complaints, and common perceptions of bias.
- ▶ A lack of systematic two-way communication between local and central government, and other coordination and communication issues, have resulted in limited awareness at the central level about local needs, and confusion regarding reconstruction policies at the local level, including among government officials.
- ▶ The level and quality of citizen participation, especially marginalized groups, remains low and efforts to ensure participation has been mostly perceived as 'superficial'.
- ▶ A regularized system for dealing with complaints and redress was still missing.

Box 3.1 IRM-1 findings (June 2015) on aid delivery and effectiveness

The first round of research conducted in June 2015 concluded that food and emergency shelter were widely considered urgent. Reconstruction of houses and cash and credit assistance

were identified as medium term needs given the approaching monsoon and winter. Comprehensive geological assessments of landslide risks were also widely considered necessary

due to fissures created by the earthquakes and potential aggravation by monsoon rains.

Initial aid focused on emergency food relief, emergency shelters such as tarps and CGI sheets, and small cash grants. Although aid in the form of food and emergency shelter was widely distributed, the amounts were often considered inadequate and the distribution was uncoordinated and chaotic. As most relief was focused on areas closer to the highways,

there was also some uneven distribution. The activation of government mechanisms such as DDRCs and RDCs was instrumental in coordinating relief including appropriating, centralizing, targeting, and distributing aid. However, the absence of a formal complaint and redress system within these mechanisms meant that emerging concerns in those early weeks, mainly related to contentious damage assessments, went unaddressed leading to dissatisfaction with the resulting beneficiary lists.

3.1. Survivor needs and the delivery of aid: 6-12 months after the earthquakes

Post-monsoon government aid, which was primarily cash assistance for temporary shelter construction/improvement and winter relief, suffered from delays and controversial beneficiary lists.

Most government aid was provided as cash assistance. To date, government programs have provided two types of cash grants. First was an allocation of NPR 15,000 to affected households to support the construction of temporary shelters. A second program provided NPR 10,000 for ‘winter relief’, aimed at helping people buy materials, including clothes and fuel, to better withstand the winter months. Both of these cash grants were provided only to households categorized as ‘fully damaged’ in the beneficiary list that was generated based on locally-led damage assessments. This aid was distributed through village-level Relief Distribution Committees (RDCs). In places where RDCs had not been formed, distribution was conducted by VDC offices in coordination with local political parties.

In many locations studied there was contention around the cash assistance, often related to the problematic damage assessments on which the RDCs based the grant distribution (see Chapter 3.4, for more details on damage assessments). Many earthquake-affected citizens noted their extreme dissatisfaction about being excluded from the cash beneficiary lists (complaints came both from cases in which a fully damaged house was wrongly labeled as only partially damaged, or from households that were missed by the assessment altogether).

Citizens and local officials both also stated that the cash provided as winter relief was too little and arrived too late. In Gorkha district, for example, the total amount needed to distribute cash assistance to all confirmed beneficiaries, an amount of NPR 70 million, was sent to the district in multiple tranches, which led to delayed distribution for some areas (prioritization was done on the basis of the level of damage). In Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, at the time of research in February 2016, 97 out of 1,131 households had yet to receive winter relief cash due to delays in the disbursement of funds by the district.

Significant reductions in government aid to earthquake-affected households compared with the period immediately after the disaster were reported by citizens and officials alike in all the districts studied. This was a result of an actual reduction in relief supply. However, some officials suggested that some of this perceived reduction in government aid might also be the result of district and VDC officials being more able to classify aid as being from the government or from non-government sources as they had a better grasp on which organizations in their locality were also delivering aid. Before the 2015 monsoon, most of the non-governmental aid that arrived in districts was recorded as government aid due to the government’s ‘one-door’ policy in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

Non-governmental organizations and foreign government development agencies provided a more diverse range of aid, with a focus on non-food relief schemes.



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Field research identified recovery-related activities from non-governmental organizations and foreign development agencies of a number of types: cash grants, sometimes as top-ups to government cash assistance, through direct distribution as well as cash for work schemes (such as rubble removal, road clearing, and debris management schemes); construction materials for private and community temporary shelters; a limited amount of food relief provided directly or through food for work programs; and, masonry and carpentry training for village residents in anticipation of reconstruction activities. Most foreign development agencies had decided not to support the rebuilding of private houses (at least at this point) and instead were focusing reconstruction support on government and community buildings (especially in health and education) and physical infrastructure (roads and bridges).

In three severely-hit districts, organizations including UNICEF, Care Nepal, MANK, and Plan International provided cash, warm clothes and other winter relief materials to complement the government's winter relief cash distribution and other cash assistance schemes. Winter preparedness kits such as blankets and warm clothes were distributed by Care Nepal in Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchowk and Barpak of Gorkha. Winterization relief was seen as a relative success by many international actors as there were no large outbreaks of disease and monitoring mechanisms involving the government and UN reportedly worked well.

Government relief activity decreased after the monsoon and was overwhelmingly focused on

cash assistance schemes for the construction of temporary shelters and winter relief.

Across all six research districts, local government activity related to the earthquakes had significantly reduced since the last round of research in June 2015. This appears to be the result of two main factors: first, the delay in the creation of the Nepal Reconstruction Authority and the absence of a reconstruction plan at the national level; and, second, reduced provision of relief from the central government to local government offices at the district and VDC levels after the monsoon season. Contributing factors to these trends included the formal end of the emergency relief period (as declared by the government in June 2015), and the national political focus on the new constitution and efforts to address the unrest in the Terai and to cope with the impacts of the blockade.¹⁵

Instead of delivering aid, most local government activity during the field research was focused on completing steps to prepare for reconstruction aid – by conducting damage assessments and distributing victim ID cards according to the results. More discussion of the assessment process is provided in Chapter 3.4, but, in short, the contested nature of the results of assessments affected perceptions of winter relief distribution. The

¹⁵ As described in Chapter 2, the new constitution was promulgated in September 2015, an act which sparked wide ranging protests especially in the Madhesh (southern areas bordering India). These protests were followed by over four months of trade blockade along the Indian border.

second round of damage assessments was used as the basis for the distribution of cash grants including the winter relief distribution. Controversy over those lists

resulted in many citizen complaints to local government bodies.

Case Study 3.1: Beneficiary card stories

The government issued ‘red cards’ to households whose houses were classified as ‘fully damaged’ by the earthquakes based on its assessment process. Those with red cards received NPR 15,000 to help with temporary shelter construction and an additional NPR 10,000 for winter relief. They were also reported to be eligible for an eventual grant of NPR 200,000 for the rebuilding of houses, and will have access to a loan of up to NPR 300,000 based on a group guarantee at 2% interest, and more with collateral. The NRA forbid house reconstruction until plans had been finalized and initially stated that any households who had rebuilt would not have access to the funds. The NRA has since also initiated its own efforts to develop a beneficiary list through a new assessment that will determine who is eligible for the grant for house rebuilding.

1 – Barpak village

A woman in Barpak lived in one house with her husband’s three younger brothers and parents when the earthquakes struck. Her husband was working in Dubai. Since the entire family lived in one house, they only received one Red Card. She knew that she would have to leave the household one day (traditionally, parents reside with the youngest son in Barpak), and so had begun building her own house on land she owned before the earthquakes. The house does not follow the government’s designs, but she hopes it is safe. She has no hope of receiving the government’s NPR 200,000, since her family’s Red Card and associated benefits will be received by her in-laws and later the youngest brother. The total house will cost her about NPR 1,200,000 after the import of stone, sand, cement, rods, and bricks from various locations.

2 – Mandre, Barpak VDC

A resident of Mandre mainly resides in Kathmandu, although she owned a shared house with her three brothers in Mandre village, considered to be the epicenter of the earthquakes. Learning of the benefits associated with Red

Cards, the family decided to ‘split up’ so they could receive four separate Red Cards. As a result, they are planning to build four houses. She had heard of other cases where people had a house in Mandre but lived elsewhere where they did not receive a Red Card. She has started clearing the rubble of her building, which already cost her NPR 50-60,000. She does not know when she is going to receive the NPR 200,000 or whether she can build her new house in her own style.

3 – Tanglichok-4

A man from Tanglichok has three brothers. His father had built two houses and split his property between the four brothers. So he and one of his brothers lived in a single house, although the inheritance had been split officially. When the government’s engineers visited the area, they categorized the house as fully damaged. But they did not recognize that the two brothers had officially split into two households – they even ate in separate kitchens. Only one Red Card was given to the house, and all of the benefits that arrived had to be divided across two households.

4 – Dhuwakot VDC

The VDC Overseer for Dhuwakot creates financial estimates and assists with the implementation of government projects in the VDC. His house was *pakki* (built with bricks and cement). When the data assessors visited, they made a mistake, categorizing his house as *kacchi* (built with mud). While government policy stated that those residing in *pakki* houses would not be eligible for Red Cards, he still received one. He explained that he initially did not know the policy as the VDC Secretary had not notified residents of such details. Other community members with *pakki* houses did not receive Red Cards and they complained about the unfairness, as did owners of *kacchi* houses wrongly listed as *pakki*. As a result of the complaints, the Overseer decided to return his Red Card.

Reconstruction of houses was widely cited by both institutions and individuals as the highest priority need, followed by cash grants and loans for reconstruction. A desire for clear reconstruction policies and effective communication of those policies to the district and VDC were also cited as priorities.

It was clear from interviews with district, VDC and ward level interlocutors, that the reconstruction of houses is perceived as the most urgent need across all the districts visited. Almost all respondents, including political leaders, bureaucrats, NGO workers and general citizens, are unanimous on this point. Generally, this and other needs that had been framed as medium to long term by respondents during the first round of research in June 2015— such as reconstruction of community infrastructure—are now seen as urgent needs.

VDC and district level government officials

indicated the following types of assistance as high priority needs:

- Building reconstruction;
- Clear guidelines on reconstruction;
- Cash and provisions for soft loans;
- Construction of community infrastructure;
- Training on masonry and carpentry techniques;
- Technical assistance to build houses according to the government's reconstruction guidelines.

Non-governmental organizations largely identified similar priorities, although they also highlighted livelihood support as a means to aid earthquake victim recovery. The only difference between priorities as stated by government officials and citizens was that citizens also ranked access to safe drinking water as a priority.¹⁶ Secondary to this, they also identified roads and other forms of infrastructure as significant needs.

Demand is still high for geological land assessments to determine landslide risks. People in high risk areas would prefer to be resettled permanently somewhere safe but close to their original settlements.

Across the research districts, we encountered victims in settlements that perceived a risk of landslides, including Syaule VDC (ward 8) of Sindhupalchowk district and Barpak VDC (wards 2 and 5) of Gorkha

district. Respondents in these areas stated that geological assessments of land safety were a very high priority. These communities also rated any need emerging from an assessment to resettle groups deemed to be on unsafe land as a priority. While it is unclear what the actual level of risk in these communities is, in all VDCs assessments have yet to materialize.

In four of the 18 VDCs visited, research respondents reported that geological experts had visited areas (in June 2015) where there were fissures and landslide risks but that no official report had been shared at the VDC level. Even VDC officials were unaware about the findings of the experts. As such, the visits by the experts have not been useful for helping the earthquake survivors decide between staying in potentially dangerous areas and relocating elsewhere. For those households living in temporary shelters in areas with perceived high risk of landslides, researchers found that they clearly favored permanent resettlement, but strongly preferred to be closer to their original homes due to attachments like their existing sources of income or local relationships and networks.

Aid delivered post-monsoon did not match perceived needs of the people, potentially due to a lack of official needs assessments at the ward, VDC, and district levels.

Overall, there is currently a disjuncture between the aid that earthquake-affected households think is urgent and the aid that has been/is being delivered to them. Field research in February 2016 found that ward leaders and citizens identified the reconstruction of houses, cash/credit support, and access to water and better sanitation for those still in temporary shelters as their highest priority needs. However, the aid provided to date both by government and non-government aid providers has mostly focused on providing emergency shelter, food, and cash grants. (This was a continuation of the types of relief distributed in the early months after the earthquakes). Figure 3.1 highlights this disjuncture, showing that the types of aid provided do not match well with the perceived needs of the citizens. The exception is cash grants.

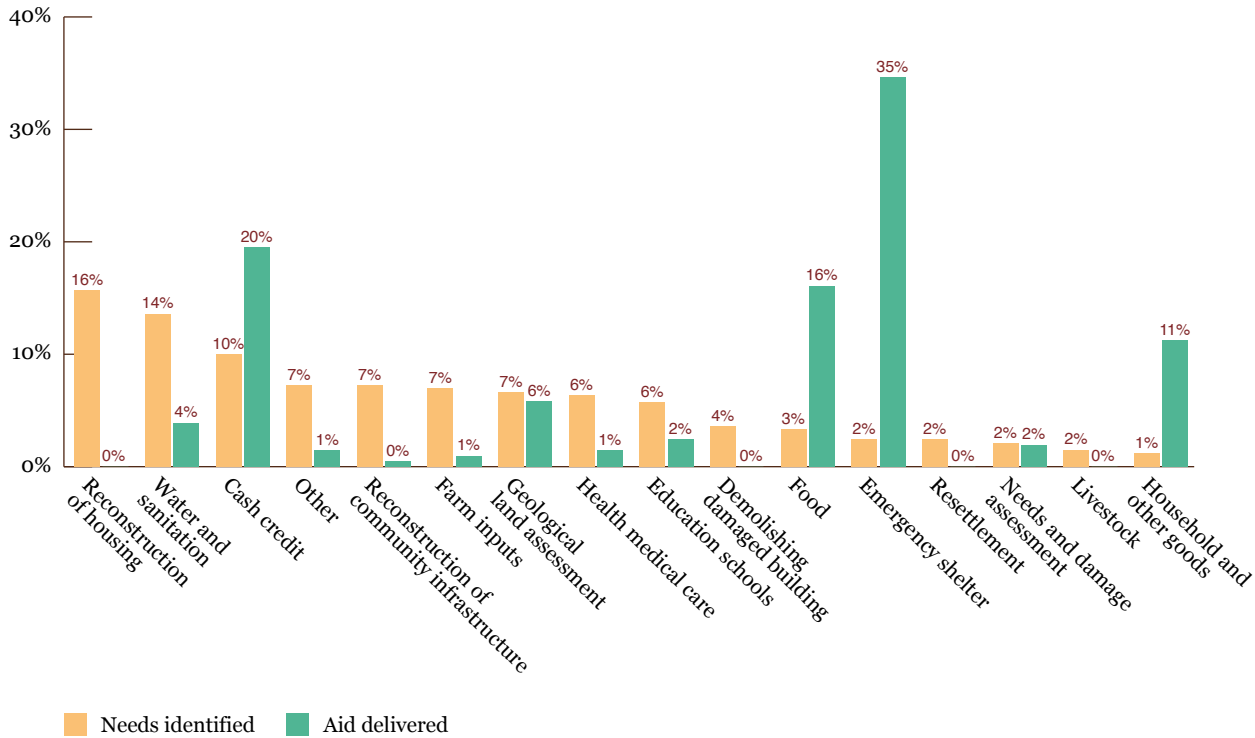
Some of these differences might be caused by the limitations of assessments carried out. Mechanisms to track the evolving situation seem limited, and the lack of this information may affect the ability of aid providers to provide more nuanced responses to needs. Research at the ward and VDC level found that local government officials across all six districts visited reported that they did not conduct formal needs assessments because the central government had not requested this information. The lack of structured information gathering or clear communication to aid providers of local leads is widespread. Only Gorkha district has developed a clear guide for recovery activities in their

¹⁶ Water sources were badly affected in all the VDCs in four districts visited (Sindhupalchowk, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, and Gorkha) but not in Syangja or Solukhumbu districts. There have been very few official attempts to address these water problems. In Syaule and Baruwa VDCs of Sindhupalchowk district, the VDC has allocated funds to repair the water supply, but repairs had not yet happened at the time of research. (See Case Study 7.1).

district in the form of a 12-point declaration. Despite this good practice example, VDC level stakeholders in

Gorkha, including VDC secretaries, were unaware of the declaration and its contents.

Figure 3.1: Needs identified by ward respondents compared against types of aid scheme delivered in those wards



In Figure 3.1 the orange bar shows the percentage of wards in which citizens identified each type of aid as a high priority. The green bar shows the percentage of schemes across the areas studied focusing on that category of aid, so it does not take the value or size of each scheme into account.

The government had not started reconstruction in the districts visited as of February/March 2016, leaving district and VDC level officials helpless, and many earthquake-affected angry.

Due to significant delays in forming the NRA, government-led reconstruction efforts had not yet been initiated at the time of the field research. In the absence of a clear national policy or active programs, there were no major reconstruction activities happening in any of the research districts during the data collection period, and even much of the preparatory work seems to have remained undone. Gorkha, for example, has been chosen to host one of the eight sub-regional offices of the NRA. Yet at the time of the research team's visit in February 2016, the office did not yet exist. The only evidence of this office or government reconstruction efforts was a signboard for a 'Project Implementation Unit' of the NRA, spotted at the DDRC by the research team.

At the time of data collection, the NRA's only significant action regarding reconstruction had been to send a circular to districts stating that district officials should not allow the building or rebuilding of houses without permission from the NRA. January and February saw the NRA try to assert control over reconstruction. After field research was completed, the NRA carried out a re-assessment of housing damage with the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). Once that was completed in 11 out of 14 of the most affected districts, the NRA started the distribution of a first installment of reconstruction grants, beginning in Singati, Dolakha, in mid-March,¹⁷ approximately two

¹⁷ The process of receiving the first installment requires a tripartite agreement between earthquake victims, local authorities, and the NRA. Protests and complaints during this distribution and donor requests led the NRA to adjust its policy to be more flexible on several issues, such as: (1) on the involvement of NGOs in reconstruction; (2) on distributing the cash grant to individuals

weeks after the data collection finished for this report. At the time of this research, in part as a result of the circular to stop unmanaged reconstruction, the majority of earthquake-affected households throughout the districts visited were waiting for the government to give permission and clarify financial support to begin the reconstruction of their houses.

The significant delay in creating a reconstruction plan at the national level put district level actors, including the Chief District Officer (CDO) and Local Development Officer (LDO), in a difficult position. These actors are unsure what to communicate to earthquake-affected citizens and lack the concrete information required to respond to queries from local residents. Local residents frequently ask local government officials for advice and guidelines on issues ranging from the correct type of houses they are supposed to build, to information about government financial assistance for reconstruction.

The CDO in Syangja district said, “We have been anxiously awaiting instructions from the center with regards to reconstruction, as people keep asking us when the government policies on reconstruction will come.” She added, “We don’t have answers to their questions as we have not received any instructions from the center.” During the field research, district level government actors said that they were expecting

clear instructions related to reconstruction from the NRA by Baishakh 12, 2073 (24 April 2016).

The government’s delay in starting formal reconstruction efforts has not been well received by earthquake-affected people. Anger and frustration has been building as families have had to endure difficult conditions, living in transitional shelters throughout the monsoon and winter seasons, and finding themselves still living in shelters a year after the earthquakes. Despite this anger, most earthquake-affected people are still waiting for guidance on rebuilding from the NRA – in part because many reported feeling afraid that if they start rebuilding they might break the still unclear government rebuilding codes. Others just do not have the means to begin to rebuild.

Continued delays in reconstruction guidelines created a dilemma among earthquake-affected families that was made more complicated by the very limited time for rebuilding between the end of the border blockade and the beginning of the 2016 monsoon. In the end almost all households chose to wait for guidance before rebuilding, meaning that only a very small minority of households had started reconstructing their houses at the time of the field research. This group feared the onset of the 2016 monsoon more than the consequences of defying the government order not to rebuild without NRA approval.

Case Study 3.2: Indecision due to unclear and delayed government policy

A 57-year-old resident of Katunje-4 has already been living in a hut made up of tarpaulin and dried tree-leaves (*shyaula*) for nine months. Once he received a beneficiary card, which categorized his house as fully damaged, and NPR 15,000 from the government, he demolished his damaged house. Being unclear on government policy and guidelines for rebuilding houses, which he expects will provide him with a model of a house to build and further financial assistance, he felt it difficult to decide whether or not to start building new house. After discussion with his family, he ultimately decided to construct a new house so that his family would not

have to suffer yet another cold winter and wet monsoon in the leaf hut.

He started building the new house. He reported that he “carried stones from a place that was a four hour walk away and paid more than ten thousand for the stones. I also paid for laborers to dig a six-foot deep trench for a strong foundation to start building a two-room structure.” Once he had started building this house, other villagers told him about a rumor that starting to build without the permission of government officers would bar him from getting any compensation and financial assistance from the

who have rebuilt their homes by themselves (as long as they meet the guidelines, CBS figures suggest at least 31,000 homes have already been rebuilt); and (3) on the need for citizenship and land revenue certificates in the housing aid distribution procedure.

government in the future. Some village leaders asked him to stop the construction, and he complied. “I decided to stop the construction,” he told the research team while pointing to the newly constructed foundation for the building.

Deciding to try to clarify the matter, he undertook the two hour walk and four hour bus-ride to the district headquarter to gather information. Once there, someone showed him a few models of quake-resistant houses that should guide rebuilding. He quickly realized that he could not afford to build according to the model-house standard. He is currently planning to construct a small building which will be stronger than his old house saying that he “want[s] to build a house that does not leak in the monsoon and can be easily abandoned if need be.” Despite this plan, he has dropped his intentions to restart construction indefinitely, until he receives more information.

In another case, a woman in Okhaldhunga district who had been living in a bamboo-shed, had bought gravel and sand to start the construction of a new house. But other villagers advised her that building a house which does not comply with the model set by the government may bar her from getting government financial assistance for rebuilding. She told researchers that this possibility has left her confused so that she has not been able to decide to start the construction of a new house. She says that if “the government informs us about its assistance and the criteria, I would start to buy rebuilding materials. But I will not unless the government will give us clear guidance.”

Throughout the data collection researchers encountered many other families in multiple VDCs and districts who were similarly confused, and struggling to make decisions on when and how to rebuild.

The only reconstruction-related assistance observed in the districts has been carried out by NGOs (domestic and international) and foreign governmental development agencies, but this activity has been minimal.¹⁸

In the absence of government-led reconstruction, the small amount of post-earthquake reconstruction-related assistance that has occurred has been carried out by national and international non-governmental aid providers (NGOs and INGOs), and international governmental aid agencies. In Sindhupalchowk, Gorkha, and Ramechhap districts, some NGOs have been conducting preparatory activities for reconstruction, such as providing masonry and carpentry trainings. For example, the Red Cross Society in Ramechhap district has trained a total of 786 individuals (577 masons and 209 carpenters). The INGO, Plan, and the Japanese government development agency, JICA, have also been providing masonry training in some districts.

Some organizations are moving ahead with reconstruction of community buildings in line with government guidelines. Some, including JICA, are in the preparatory phase of supporting the reconstruction of community buildings such as VDC offices, health posts, police posts, and schools. REED Nepal, a NGO, which had earlier provided masonry training to more than 50 people in Solukhumbu district, is now involved in repairing, retrofitting and reconstructing school buildings in the district.

In lower impact districts, such as Syangja, Solukhumbu, and Okhaldhunga, there are no non-governmental and development actors working on reconstruction. In practice this means that there is no assisted reconstruction happening in these places. One small exception encountered by researchers was a man in Solukhumbu district’s Nele VDC, an employee of a small INGO working on house reconstruction. His approach was to work directly with earthquake-affected

¹⁸ I/NGO and foreign agency reconstruction activity has also been hampered by NRA restrictions and uncertainty. In January-February, it appeared likely that earthquake-affected households who chose to rebuild using I/NGO or foreign agency support would not be eligible for any government grants, meaning that INGOs/foreign agencies would have to take on responsibility for the full cost of building houses (something that many may be reluctant to do). I/NGOs also face other restrictions, such as

limitations on INGO operational costs (no more than 20% of the total project budget) and restrictions on the number of visas for international staff. Both restrictions are contained in the NRA’s draft ‘Mobilization of NGOs for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Procedure, 2016,’ document.

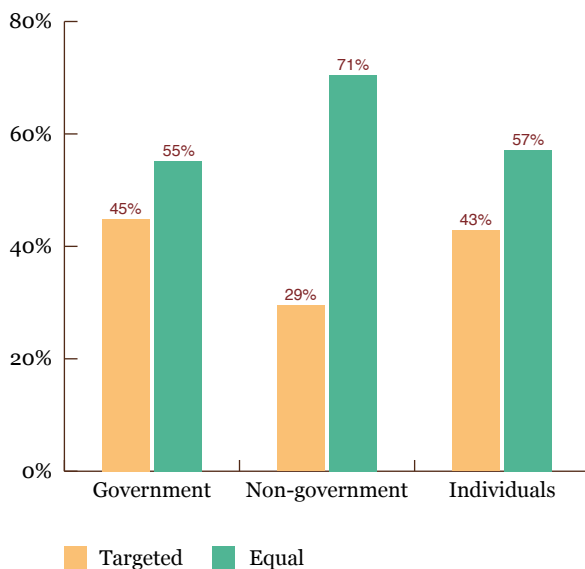
¹⁹ Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Phase 1, September 2015; <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AWAidandRecoveryQualitativeFieldMonitoring.pdf>

households as an individual rather than formally as an NGO representative in order to avoid bureaucratic hurdles. His task was to implement a scheme through which up to 100 households in the district would be supported to rebuild through the provision of cash installments. In Nele's ward 9 this project had already built two houses and was supporting six more, which were under construction at the time of the field visits.

It should again be noted that this is an exception rather than the norm. Very little reconstruction is happening; and in lower impact districts less support is generally being received than in higher impact districts, even within wards that suffered significant damage. This is a continuation of the trend identified during the first round of research in June 2015.¹⁹

3.2. Patterns and targeting by government and non-government aid providers

Figure 3.2: Targeting methods used by aid schemes



In Figure 3.2 the data is the percentage of aid schemes using a specific targeting method, rather than the amount of aid provided. So while more than half of government schemes used an equal distribution approach, the absolute value of targeted aid may account for a larger proportion of funds.

Equal distribution of aid was the preferred targeting pattern for most aid schemes encountered.

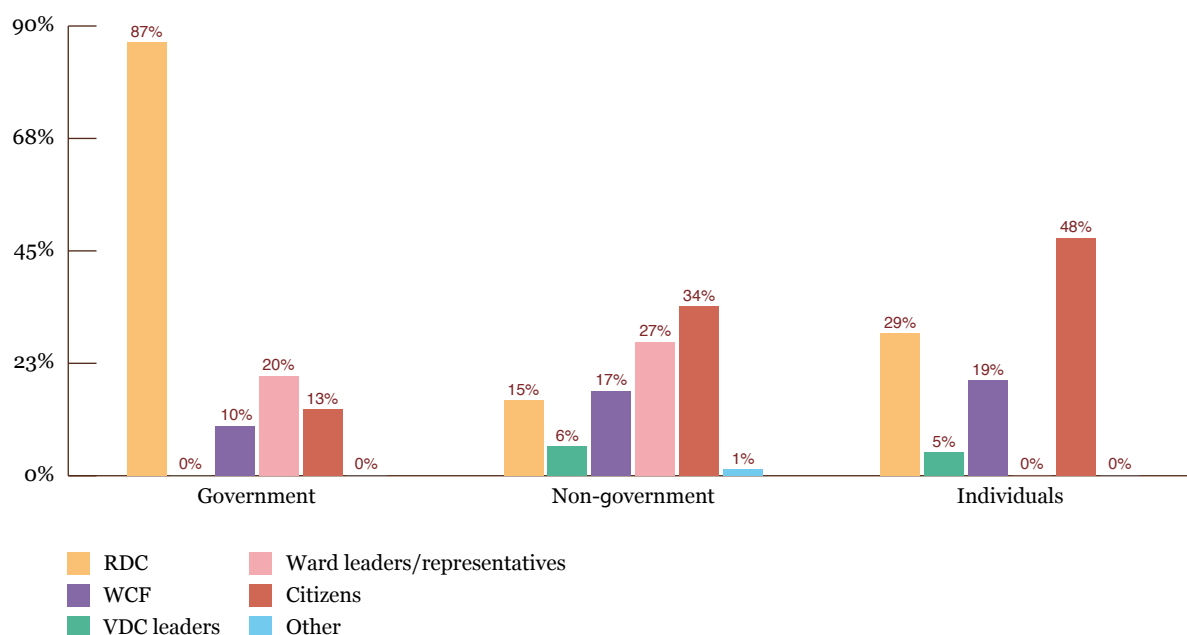
Aid providers across wards visited distributed aid more equally than equitably. Findings from research in June 2015 indicated that donors preferred distributing aid equally across settlements over targeting specific vulnerable or affected groups to avoid potential tensions that could arise from

perceived discrimination. This was particularly the case in severely hit districts where levels of damage were largely uniform and relief amounts were sufficient for equal distribution.

During the February 2016 data collection, researchers were told that government and non-government aid providers still preferred equal distribution, but to a lesser extent compared to initial relief phase due to decreases in amounts of relief available. Targeting was carried out based on various needs assessments, ranging from the formal government damage assessments to local assessments conducted by specific donors. The data collected in this round of research (presented in Figure 3.1) show that almost half of the government schemes were targeted towards a specific group of beneficiaries (for example, reconstruction and winter cash assistance were provided only to fully damaged households).

While local coordinating bodies remained important for government aid, non-governmental aid was more likely to work with citizens or ward level actors directly.

Village level RDCs were reportedly the most common channel for the distribution of government relief. On the other hand, most non-governmental and individual aid providers worked by reaching out directly to citizens. Non-governmental aid providers were also reported to have been more likely to work with Ward Citizen Forums and ward leaders directly to help coordinate and target the distribution of relief.

Figure 3.3: Pathways for aid distribution by aid schemes

In Figure 3.3 the figures presented are the percentage of aid schemes that reported to researchers different primary channels for targeting and distributing aid.

3.3. Coordination of aid

Central government communication and consultation with district and VDC level officials has been limited, both in terms of listening to needs and communicating timelines and processes relating to government reconstruction and recovery programs.

District and VDC officials have not yet been asked by the NRA to contribute to the identification of priority earthquake-related needs. As such, at the time of the field research there was no official data or analysis available on needs at the district, VDC, or ward levels. Interviews with district officials suggest that these officials are largely aware of the specific needs of the earthquake survivors in their area. But without clear lines of communication in place, their knowledge does not necessarily reach the central government, NGOs, or the general public, and therefore does not feed into efforts to plan responses.

Although many district officials have a sense of what support is needed—such as construction of community infrastructure, and training on masonry and carpentry techniques—they lack an understanding of how the official processes to provide support will be

undertaken. As they have not been well informed on these issues, they are in turn unable to communicate updates on government programs to local officials and citizen stakeholders at the VDC and ward levels.

Lack of consultation and communication led to confusion amongst local officials in all districts visited regarding the creation and implementation of district reconstruction policies.

None of the districts or VDCs visited had their own official policy or plan for reconstruction and recovery. In the locations visited, VDC secretaries, as well as district level officials, were unaware of any district-level policy for reconstruction or the modality that would be used for the implementation of government reconstruction efforts. Instead, the district administrations are following decisions, directives and instructions from the central government when they arrive.

One exception to this was Gorkha district, where donors had worked with the DDRC to organize and fund a November 2015 workshop to review and conduct strategic planning for reconstruction and

rehabilitation in the district. The workshop identified needs and priorities in the district and developed a 12-point declaration that has now become the guiding document for reconstruction activities in the district. Despite this, research did not find any significant progress on the reconstruction of public or private houses in the three VDCs visited in Gorkha district.

District level coordination

DDRCs have largely become inactive but other local actors have bridged the gaps and maintained coordination efforts.

Although there have not been any substantial changes in the composition of the District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs), meetings are far less frequent than in the initial relief period. Most district level stakeholders interviewed reported that their district's DDRC now meets "only when necessary," which seems to mean when new relief schemes arrive.

Different districts have seen different combinations of actors filling any gap caused by a less active DDRC. In Gorkha district, for example, other district level institutions, such as the District Administration Office and the District Development Committee, have taken over the handling of damage assessments and the management of aid delivery. In Solukhumbu district, the majority of relief activities are now conducted outside of the DDRC channels, and are led by the Chief District Officer (CDO) and Local Development Officer (LDO).²⁰ Since these same actors already served on the DDRC, there is actually still continuity with aid coordination despite DDRC inactivity. Of course in districts with rapid turnovers in CDOs and LDOs, including Okhaldhunga, Sindhupalchowk, and Gorkha, there has been a greater impact on continuity.

There are some emerging concerns relating to how local government officials and the DDRCs and RDCs will coordinate with NRA field offices, along with increasing deployments of Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) and Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) Project Implementation Units. The lead implementation unit for individual housing reconstruction is based in MoUD, while MoFALD is responsible for rebuilding local government offices. However, it is the NRA that is setting policy and making agreements for the provision of grants. These two ministries are also involved in implementing the housing grants and technical

Government staff turnover has also been a problem. In Gorkha, for instance, there have been three CDOs since the earthquakes. These frequent changes likely have a negative impact on coordination, as well as knowledge of activities and policies related to relief and reconstruction.

assistance (MoFALD distributes grants, MoUD provides technical support). In addition, the May 2016 Post-Disaster Recovery Framework proposes an entirely new District Coordination Committee (DCC) to coordinate and monitor reconstruction in each of the 31 affected districts. The DCC will be led by MPs from the area on a rotational basis. This means that, at the district level alone, there will be at least five bodies directly mandated to work on reconstruction (the DDRC, NRA, MoUD, MoFALD, and DCC).

Communication from the district level to the VDCs is problematically weak.

Communication between district headquarters and the VDCs, which research found to have mostly taken place through the VDC secretaries, is happening in an informal and unstructured way. Communication approaches differ between VDCs, and generally the situation does not lend itself to uniform coordination. The only indication of an actual formalized information-sharing system across VDCs and with the district was in Gorkha where VDC secretaries from all VDCs meet at the District Development Committee office on every 4th and 5th day of the Nepali month.

District level decisions and orders are being formally communicated to VDC level officials through circulars and directives. In the absence of those clear directives, VDC level officials and citizens reported that they have to rely on informal conversations, direct phone calls and media reports for information on reconstruction policies. In some districts, earthquake-damaged media infrastructure has yet to be repaired. Since the media has been an important source of information on reconstruction policies in some places, for both VDC and ward level officials, as well as citizens, this has exacerbated the problem. Journalists in Solukhumbu and Sindhupalchowk districts expressed dissatisfaction about the slow pace of repairs to damaged media infrastructure, which they felt was depriving citizens of crucial information.

²⁰ In this case, however, it might be that the DDRC's influence in Solukhumbu was never particularly strong as during the initial relief phase the DDRC was only able to implement the 'one door

policy' (where all aid coming into the district was to be funneled through the DDRC) in the VDCs close to the district headquarters.

Case Study 3.3: A controlled and insufficient information regime

The CDO office in Solukhumbu maintains tight control over earthquake-related information. As the head of the DDRC, the CDO who was in place during the earthquakes (he has since been transferred and replaced) was reported to have made most of the decisions on planning and coordination of the initial response. “He even kept all the minutes of every meeting on his own laptop,” said a journalist who attended some DDRC meetings. All information circulated to the media had to be authorized by the CDO himself. There was no information on decisions and planning at the DDC office, which is headed by the LDO. Information was held with the CDO’s office. Researchers needed the permission of the CDO to receive information on organizations and individuals involved in relief/reconstruction before they could receive the data from the district police office.

Interlocutors at the district HQ attribute this tight approach to information to the personality of the previous CDO, who was described as someone who wanted to maintain clarity and keep order. He also wanted to strictly implement the one-door policy in relief coordination efforts as instructed by the Nepal Government. Some local actors expressed the view that information was also being controlled to obscure the fact that not much work had happened in the months since the emergency relief phase.

In addition to tight controls on information, there is also a lack of clear policy guidance available at all levels of government. At the DDC office, two officers explained the challenges cre-

ated by having insufficient information: “Every day we meet people who ask us whether they can rebuild their own houses, and whether or not they would receive the cash/loan assistance if they rebuild,” the account officer told us. “We simply have no answers. So we just ask them to file an application with their issue and tell them it will be reviewed soon.”

Information gaps can have serious consequences, including the spreading of damaging rumors, some of which were accidentally started by local officials who speculated on policies. One common misinformation was that houses listed as ‘fully damaged’ would have to be demolished within two weeks otherwise the army would come and destroy them. Researchers met multiple households whose houses were uninhabitable but who had requested changes in categorization to ‘partially damaged’ to avoid this (false) threat of demolition. Later these households were angry and frustrated after they saw that people in the ‘fully damaged’ category did not have to demolish their homes. Because their houses were reclassified, they did not receive the cash grants that had been distributed.

Confusion has also arisen due to rumors about building standards and requirements. As some households consider rebuilding their houses before the 2016 monsoon, there are rumors that new houses need to be “earthquake-resistant,” but people do not know what that entails. This is causing delays in decision-making and fears among those who have gone forward with rebuilding plans.

Village level

Village Development Committees (VDCs) have played a central role in managing and coordinating aid delivery, as well as dealing with pressure from citizens.

Village-level Relief Distribution Committees (RDCs) were coordinated by VDC secretaries and attended

by local level political party representatives, social mobilizers, as well as coordinators and members of Ward Citizens Forums (WCFs).²¹ Although research teams in each district found the RDCs to be less active than they had been during the initial relief period, they were still playing a role in coordination, identifying target groups, and facilitating distribution, of both government and non-government relief programs.

RDC decision-making was generally perceived to be dominated by political parties. VDC secretaries closely collaborated with leaders of political parties, an observation that also held true in areas where RDCs were not formed. Local interviews suggested

²¹ The Ward Citizens Forum is an ad hoc local governance unit established at the ward level to ensure citizen participation in local decision-making process relating to their ward and VDC. WCF was established as a transitional mechanism until local elections are held at the ward level.

that most VDC secretaries performed reasonably well in coordinating relief and ensuring that aid distribution followed government policies and directives. Despite this, in many of the VDCs visited it was clear that VDC secretaries often succumbed to pressure from local citizens and political leaders when government directives were locally perceived as being too strict or impractical. For example, in one VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, the VDC secretary decided under pressure from local residents to distribute victim ID cards to families who had a fully damaged house locally, but who also owned houses in Kathmandu and elsewhere. This decision was not consistent with instructions from the government.

There were also cases observed where VDC secretaries resisted local pressure as well. Citizens complained to VDC secretaries about flawed damage assessments

and exclusion from beneficiary lists across the research districts. However, in most cases VDC secretaries avoided making decisions on these complaints by forwarding the cases to the DDRC at the district level. This proved a useful tactic for some. In Dhuwakot VDC, Gorkha district, the VDC Secretary received threats in a bid to pressure her to include 200 additional households in the beneficiary list that had resulted from an assessment led by district level engineers, in which the VDC Secretary had participated. The VDC Secretary convinced the complainants that only the DDRC had the authority to amend the list, and forwarded these complaints on to district authorities. The situation was resolved peacefully when a team of attorneys was sent by the DDRC to investigate and recommend changes to the beneficiary list based on their findings.²²

Non-governmental coordination

Coordination of I/NGOs, foreign agencies and UN agencies with local governments has reportedly been less effective in recent months than before.

Initially strong coordination efforts have suffered due to a number of reasons including: the reduced DDRC activity; local government liaison officers returning to their former posts; local government staff turnover; and humanitarian staff turnover. Additionally, the withdrawal of UN OCHA field offices (OCHA left Nepal in December 2015), and the closing or transition of most humanitarian clusters in late 2015, has affected coordination.

The lack of coordination forums has placed greater pressure on District Lead Support Agencies (DLSAs, typically I/NGOs who are assigned to support disaster preparedness and response) to support coordination between various aid providers and local government. OCHA field offices, based in the three humanitarian hubs (Gorkha, Sindhupalchowk, and Kathmandu), had been able to take a cross-district perspective in managing these efforts, something which DLSAs cannot do.

3.4. Damage assessments

Contention around damage assessments and the resulting beneficiary lists still exist.

In December 2015, the government publicized that its reconstruction program would begin from the one-year anniversary of the 25 April 2015 earthquake. However, when the NRA finally came into being in December 2015, its leadership decided that due to the highly contested nature of the initial damage assessments, and to respond to donor requests, another damage assessment was needed. This NRA led assessment was conducted using Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) enumerators. This decision has been controversial and the new assessments have already been contested during the NRA's first effort to conclude reconstruction grant agreements

with affected households in Dolakha. Many people protested against distribution on the basis of the CBS verified data. Instead they demanded that it distribution be based on the original—second—assessment, which seems to have reported many more

²² The complainants were categorized as 'partially damaged' despite sustaining similar level of damages to their neighbors who were categorized as 'fully damaged'. The dispute was resolved as majority of households were eventually included in the 'fully damaged' category.

‘fully damaged’ houses than have been found in the initial phases of the NRA assessments.²³

This frustration with the newest damage assessment is the latest in a series of contentions and disputes that have arisen from the process of assessing damage. Most VDCs completed their first damage assessment within a week of the 25 April earthquake, usually using local actors (VDC officials, local political party leaders, schoolteachers, and WCF members) to complete the data collection. These initial assessments were informal and ad hoc in nature, but were significant in helping to manage initial emergency relief.

After the DDRCs formed in the weeks following the 25 April earthquake, they conducted a second damage assessment, which was generally carried out within a month of the first earthquake. Whereas the initial assessment aimed only to support emergency relief distribution, the second assessment was an attempt to gather more comprehensive data. This second assessment was supposed to be carried out by a team that included an engineer. While it was implemented by the DDRRC, instructions were provided by the central government on how it should be conducted.

The second damage assessment was used to generate an earthquake relief beneficiary list for each VDC. This DDRRC-led assessment focused on damage to houses, categorizing each house into three levels: ‘fully damaged’, ‘partially damaged,’ and ‘normal’. Households found to have houses that were fully damaged were given victim ID cards and prioritized for government relief. As mentioned in the first round report,²⁴ because of the direct link of the assessment to aid provision, and the seemingly disorganized way it was conducted in many locations, this second assessment became a significant source of contention throughout all districts.

Residents cited multiple reasons for frustration with the damage assessment process including: inconsistent assessment procedures; a lack of clear policies and guidance; assessment teams without technical knowledge; differences between the multiple assessments that took place; and manipulation and interference by political parties.

²³ Dolakha (which was not studied in the second phase of IRM) was one of the first districts where the government concluded reconstruction grant agreements: <http://myrepublica.com/society/story/38667/local-protests-mar-quake-grant-distribution.html>

²⁴ The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal (2015). *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (June 2015)*. Kathmandu and Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.

Some of the contention emerged because assessments were not carried out uniformly across and even within districts. During the research many citizens recognized this. For example, in severely affected districts, the DDRRC conducted the damage assessment with a team that included a trained engineer and junior engineers. In lower impact districts, such as Syangja and Solukhumbu, the assessment was conducted by WCF members, local leaders, and VDC officials. Word of mouth and rumors about these differences in different locations seem to have affected the views of many of the community members interviewed.

The timing of the assessments and accessibility of wards were variables that affected the accuracy of information collected. Due to significant aftershocks and the second earthquake on 12 May, in some VDCs the assessment did not capture the full extent of the damage. In Dhuwakot VDC in Gorkha and Bamtibhandar VDC in Ramechhap districts, the second assessment was conducted before the 12 May earthquake. Despite increased damage, no further assessment was made in these locations. In some cases, the second assessment did not occur at all. In Baruwā VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, for example, the assessment team did not visit wards 1, 2, 3, and 4 due to their remote location and safety concerns. Instead, the assessment team re-used the secondary data from the initial post-quake assessment, which had been carried out by a local teacher.

In the VDCs and wards where the assessment did take place, many research respondents were of the opinion that the technicians in the teams were not well trained. This led many to suggest that the outcome of the assessment was based more on the tendencies of the individuals who made up the teams rather than being a product of a uniform process that could be trusted. Moreover, there were communication issues throughout. Critical issues relating to the assessments were not explained to residents, including key issues such as the basis for determining damage levels and the implications of being classified in a specific category on relief eligibility and access to an earthquake victim identity card.

In the absence of comprehensive guidelines, assessment teams ended up negotiating and problem-solving when issues arose during assessments. This process led to varying solutions, and allowed scope for the exploitation of the process for personal gain, as well as leading to discrepancies in outcomes across VDCs. Collectively, this heightened mistrust of the assessments.

Even the number of households in a given locality became an issue of confusion and contention during the assessments. Compared to the 2011 census, the second damage assessment showed a dramatic increase in the



Photo: Amanda Gurung

reported number of households in many wards. In certain locations this jump in households even occurred between the first and second damage assessments. In Sindhupalchowk district, for example, there was a 34% increase in the number of households reported compared to the 2011 census; in Ramechhap district, the increase was 20%. While some of these increases might be due to actual demographic trends since 2011, this cannot fully explain the explosion in the number of households. These figures raise questions about potential inflation of figures, but they also reveal confusion about how a 'household' was to be defined in the context of earthquake recovery. For example, how to count those who owned another house outside the district? How to deal with families who had divided their inheritance and chosen to live separately but who had not legally separated their affairs? Research found that in some cases male family members (brothers, or father and son), who had not divided their inheritance and did not live separately, had managed to successfully push for classification as separate households.

Research did not find clear benefits for local officials deciding on these critical questions in one way or the other. Instead, it appears there was just a tendency in many areas to succumb to pressures from local citizens

and political parties. In either case, it is clear is that the unregulated process for conducting the assessment made erroneous entries possible.

Categorizing houses as 'fully damaged' or 'partially damaged' was the most contentious issue for assessments.

Many complaints heard by researchers about the damage assessments focused on decisions to categorize houses as either fully damaged or partially damaged. The subjective nature of the term partially damaged certainly contributed to contention, as did the fact that only those households with fully damaged houses would be able to benefit from most government relief programs. Research found that earthquake victims in most VDCs were not convinced that the application of categories had been thorough or fair – and many had issues with the partially damaged category, particularly when it had been applied to houses that had been rendered unlivable but that had not totally collapsed.

In districts like Syangja and Solukhumbu, where there were no engineers present in the damage assessments, the local officials involved in the assessment tended

to be more generous in their application of the fully damaged label. In Solukhumbu district, for example, the Relief Distribution Committee's assessment team reportedly even asked some of the house owners which category they wanted their house to be in. And a teacher in Solukhumbu told our research team that, "only half of the households in the official list deserve to be in the fully damaged category." Even in the districts where there were engineers present in the assessment teams, local leaders of political parties and other groups apparently attempted to influence teams to over-report damage so that more assistance would come to the area. For instance, in Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, the VDC secretary and the political parties followed the central government directives at first by not providing beneficiary ID cards to people with two houses (one intact and/or in Kathmandu or outside the district). Similarly, houses with only cracks were listed as partially damaged. As these rules were applied, pressure on the VDC secretary increased, and the members of the RDC insisted that the assessment team ignore these two rules. As a result of this pressure, every household in the VDC was categorized as fully damaged, and individuals who also owned an intact house in Kathmandu or outside the district were also provided with ID cards.

In one location in Gorkha district, residents explained that the inclusion of a WCF coordinator and a VDC secretary on the beneficiary list, despite their houses being relatively undamaged, had led local citizens to form the opinion that the damage assessments had been compromised by influential people and were not accurate.

Inconsistencies in assessments led to widespread complaints, but DDRRC efforts to resolve them were halted once the NRA rolled out a new damage assessment.

Claims and complaints regarding the outcome of the second assessment increased when it became apparent that the government would only provide relief for building transitional shelters to ID card holders, and that only households with fully damaged homes were eligible for the cards. At this point citizens started to lodge complaints claiming that they had been left out of the assessment, or that their house had been wrongly categorized. In most cases, citizens lodged their complaints at the VDC office, which were generally then forwarded to the DDRRC in almost all locations.

The ways in which DDRRCs handled these complaints varied from district to district. In most districts, the DDRRC investigated the complaints, and often added some households to the beneficiary list as a result. Researchers observed that complaints about the second damage assessments were still being made and

processed in January 2016, when the NRA-mandated CBS data collection team began their assessments. Once this third assessment process had started, DDRRC efforts to investigate complaints stopped.

Several districts received a large number of complaints. In Gorkha district, for example, 59,523 households received victim ID cards after the second damage assessment. After thousands of complaints were subsequently lodged, the district formed a team comprised of the District Lawyer and representatives from the district administration office to address the complaints. By the time of the field research, this team had increased the number of victim ID cards issued to 66,144, but thousands of complaints in Gorkha remained outstanding.²⁵

In Okhaldhunga district, the DDRRC created a technical team in December 2015 to investigate 6,181 complaints about the results of damage assessments. Ultimately, however, this team's report was not made public because the NRA's CBS team initiated the third damage assessment before the investigation report was released. In Sindhupalchowk district, almost 3,400 official objections were made about households being wrongly included in the beneficiary list (which had been based on the very first damage assessment). The DDRRC formed a monitoring committee to address the complaints, but the CBS team arrived in the district while the complaints were still being assessed so the effort was discontinued.

Rumors and misinformation affected household decisions on applying for victim ID cards.

In the absence of clear and well communicated information and guidelines on government relief and reconstruction, misinformation was common and rumors affected the decisions that households made in many cases. In Syangja district, for example, the CDO reportedly told people that they should return their victim ID cards if they did not want their houses to be demolished. As a result, in Syangja's Shreekrishna Gandaki VDC, six households returned their victim ID cards and received no cash assistance. For the same reason in Waling Municipality, Syangja district, only 18 households out of 250 who had originally received victim ID cards actually accepted and received the initial cash grant of NPR 15,000.

²⁵ It should be noted that this increase by the redress committee meant that the number of households that were included in the beneficiary list (66,144) ended up reaching a level higher than the total number of households in Gorkha district according to the national census of 2011. CBS, National Population Census 2011, November 2012 (available at: http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/Population/Ward%20Level/36Gorkha_WardLevel.pdf).

Case Study 3.4: Returning the relief

A resident of Beltari in Shreekrishna Gandaki VDC-7, Syangja district, whose house was initially categorized as fully damaged, decided to return his victim ID card and the NPR 15,000 that he had received from the VDC. Out of 35 fully damaged households locally, six families in total returned their cards and cash grants. This resident's house is made of mud, cement and bricks with a zinc roof. It stands by the main road, which leads to the Kaligandaki hydropower plant where he works. The top floor of the two-story house was heavily damaged by the earthquakes, and the house was classified as fully damaged after the initial damage assessment. He received a victim ID card and NPR 15,000 in June 2015.

After aid had been distributed, local officials started telling this resident that houses cate-

gorized as fully damaged should be destroyed or vacated, but he had already used the initial grant of NPR 15,000 to repair the house. The VDC Secretary, with help from the police, pressured the resident to return the money and the victim ID card and threatened police action. Neighbors told researchers that, "the police misbehaved and it was wrong on the part of the VDC secretary to bring police into this." The resident initially resisted this pressure, but eventually decided to give the card and money back to the VDC out of concerns that the house would be destroyed. When approached by the research team, the VDC Secretary maintained that he was just following orders. Local political party leaders, however, criticized the pressure put on the resident.

Case Study 3.5: Rumors

A female owner of a small hotel in Nele VDC-7 in Solukhumbu district lived in a tent for two months after seeing major cracks in the walls and ceilings of her house following the earthquakes. The tent was provided by the VDC and Red Cross Society at a relief distribution camp at the market center. When the second earthquake hit on 12 May, her house received further damage. The local assessment team comprised of a police officer, a teacher and a WCF coordinator categorized her property as fully damaged and she received a victim ID card. Before the distribution of cash grants started, a rumor spread in Nele that houses categorized as fully damaged would be demolished by the Nepal Army before reconstruction would start. This resident further claimed that she had heard this rumor confirmed by an inspector posted to the ward.

Fearing that her house would be demolished, and that the reconstruction grant would not be sufficient to pay for its reconstruction, she

lobbied VDC officials to have the assessment of her house changed from fully damaged to partially damaged. No one questioned her decision and her status was changed. By the time she found out that it had been just a rumor, the inspector who had given her the information had been transferred to another location, and the VDC Secretary stated that no change could be made since she had already accepted a cash grant of NPR 3,000 provided for those with partially damaged houses in June.

After two months in a tent, this family did move back into their own home. Eventually they were able to fix the cracks and other damage to the house with their savings. This resident admits that in retrospect she made a poor decision and that she regrets not making more efforts to verify the rumor. She feels frustrated seeing people whose houses were less damaged receiving more assistance than her, but she is no longer seeking out pathways to change her status since her house is now fixed.

In Ramechhap district, some victims applied to change the categorization of their damaged houses from fully damaged to partially damaged following a rumor that fully damaged houses would be demolished by the Nepal Army. Another rumor in Sindhupalchowk district spread the false information that the family

members of those with victim ID cards would get opportunities for foreign university scholarships. It was reported that as a result some people permanently living in Kathmandu returned to their home villages and applied for victim ID cards, thus inflating the official number of affected persons in that area.

3.5. Accountability, complaints, and redress

There was extremely limited citizen participation in the targeting or oversight of government aid distribution mechanisms, particularly from marginalized groups.

There was reportedly little space or opportunity provided for citizen oversight over the government aid schemes and local targeting and coordination decisions taken by VDC officials and political party leaders. By design, local communities were represented at RDC meetings by Ward Citizens Forum (WCF) coordinators. However, their role was limited. Research found that these individuals played an important role in implementing aid distribution, but that they had no influence over planning and decision-making, which were led exclusively by VDC officials and political parties. For example, a WCF coordinator in Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchowk district explained to researchers that whenever relief arrives he is active in unloading the materials and supporting distribution, but that he was not at all involved in decision-making. A former WCF coordinator in Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga district described party dominance in the decision-making process: “we [citizens] only endorse what the leaders of the political parties’ floor in the meetings.” These kinds of comments were consistent across research locations and suggest that WCFs were not able to provide robust accountability of officials during the earthquake relief efforts.

VDC officials often emphasized that they had ensured citizen participation in relief efforts through the inclusion of existing WCFs, and adhering to the statutory policy of those bodies to include women and marginalized groups in decision-making. However, the majority of individuals interviewed during the field research who belonged to these particular groups perceived these efforts as superficial. Given the marginalization of citizens in decision-making and oversight of the aid distribution process, women are at an extreme disadvantage as they are already widely excluded from WCF decision-making. For example, a *Hayu* (marginalized ethnic minority group) woman member of the WCF in Ramechhap municipality said that women’s suggestions are hardly ever taken into consideration in WCF meetings.

In Syangja district, coordination and implementation of recovery-related activities were solely conducted by the VDC office. In Sindhupalchowk, Solukhumbu, Ramechhap, and Gorkha districts, citizens belonging to marginalized groups categorically dismissed their inclusion in the decision-making as ‘cosmetic’ and ‘token’ representation, done only to ‘fill the quota.’ A VDC Chairperson from the women’s wing of the Nepali Congress party in Nele VDC, Solukhumbu, took part in the RDC but was not involved in the major decision-making processes. “I went everywhere in the VDC for assessments, but I was not in the decision-making meetings. It was mostly the men who made the decisions,” she said. This was a phenomenon acknowledged by other government officials, including an LDO in Sindhupalchowk district who said, “in terms of the participation of women and vulnerable groups including Dalits, they are present in the WCFs but the *“tathaa-baatha”* (the clever ones) take decisions while others only put their signatures.” While research found that VDC officials and political parties believed that they were handling aid coordination and communication well in most cases, local residents including WCF members and coordinators lacked awareness about the RDC meetings and decisions. It should be noted, however, that this is also part of a long-standing complaint about how local forums including WCFs operate that pre-dates the earthquake response.

Both governmental and non-governmental aid distribution lacked formal accountability mechanisms.

Accepted good practice activities to ensure transparency and increase accountability during local development planning and implementation include needs assessments and planning sessions conducted at the ward level, formation of a monitoring committee separate from the project implementing committee, and a public or social audit (which is a public display/announcement of project income/expenses). However, our researchers only came across one public audit of relief and recovery projects, which focused on service provided by government offices in Okhaldhunga district. They noted that the audit was attended mainly



Photo: Binu Sharma

by the heads of the government agencies, with very limited citizen participation, and that the discussion was mainly focused on the accomplishments of district-level government agencies and their plans for the future, rather than on earthquake-related aid distribution and reconstruction planning, which were barely mentioned. As the recovery process emerged from the emergency relief phase, it might have been expected that there would be more time to invest in accountability mechanisms. Despite this, researchers found no evidence of such a transition to date.

Instances of corruption related to aid distribution are likely to have been underreported, but no clear evidence of widespread trends of abuse were found.

Only a few clear instances of corruption related to aid distribution were reported across the six research districts. However, given observed conditions that include significant political pressure, limited citi-

zen oversight, the absence of formal and systematic accountability mechanisms, and non-transparent decision making, it is very likely that corruption has been underreported.

This situation is also likely to have been exacerbated by the government's aid distribution methods, which have overwhelmingly focused on the direct distribution of large amounts of cash. This cash moved from the center to the district and then VDC levels, and was handled by a few influential individuals at each stage of the process. In the severely hit districts such as Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk, the cash amounts given by the central government to the districts were in excess of NPR 750 million. Government cash grants were then distributed throughout each district. The pathways for distribution varied somewhat: usually grants flowed through the RDC mechanisms, but sometimes they were handled directly by VDC secretaries in consultation with the local level political parties' representatives. In Syangja district, government

respondents clearly maintained that political parties were not directly involved in cash distribution, but this was not the case in other locations.

As discussed earlier, these large cash grants were also being distributed on the basis of widely contested damage assessments, which resulted in a large number of complaints. Most citizens who had lodged complaints said they did so with the VDC secretary or DDRC, but that they never heard back about their complaint. It is noteworthy that complaints focused not only on the exclusion of households from the beneficiary lists, but that many focused on the false inclusion of some households. The government itself also reported problems counting households, as figures for the total number of households in each district substantially increased compared to the 2011 census. In Sindhupalchowk district, a monitoring committee was formed to investigate false claims. The committee recommended a system be implemented whereby ID cards would only be provided to households that were able to present three affidavits attesting to their claim as a household. Out of almost 3,400 objections made in Sindhupalchowk about false claims, thus far 200 individuals had returned back their ID cards.

Non-governmental organizations and foreign government development agencies generally prioritized informing DDRCs and bypassed VDC level committees when distributing aid.²⁶

The levels of coordination between non-governmental organizations and village level RDCs were found to be inconsistent across all the VDCs visited. Non-governmental aid frequently bypasses the RDCs, despite their formal role as the focal point for the planning and coordination of aid distribution.

During the initial relief period, non-governmental organizations were reported to have coordinated well with the RDCs, centralizing relief materials and equally distributing them among affected households. The willingness of NGOs to channel relief through the RDCs was widely appreciated by local residents, who believed that such coordination led to equal distribution of aid, avoided conflict, and increased transparency. However, once the initial

relief phase was considered over, non-governmental aid began to be largely distributed without government oversight. This has made it difficult for local officials to comprehensively track the total amount of aid coming into a district, and the total number of beneficiaries of that aid, and has limited oversight and accountability opportunities for local residents.

NGOs do often still register with the DDRCs and, in limited instances, with the RDCs, but this is often limited to registering the type and amount of relief they are bringing into the district or VDC. In most cases there is little or no coordination regarding actual distribution and the process for targeting aid to certain beneficiaries. DDRCs and VDCs in severely hit districts, such as Sindhupalchowk, Ramechhap, and Gorkha, had more detailed and systematic information about non-governmental aid than those in relatively less affected districts, such as Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, and Syangja.

The majority of NGOs reported a preference for working through their own staff for targeting and distribution with direct communication with earthquake-affected persons (sometimes through WCFs). Given overall declines in aid flows, and unlike during the initial relief phase, NGO aid is now more likely to be targeted to specific population groups. In many ways this makes it more problematic that VDC stakeholders have been less involved in deciding who should receive aid. In Syaule VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, residents reported these practices and suggested that this has led to resentment among those citizens who have been left out.

These practices are not consistent for all NGOs or in all VDCs. In Lisankhu VDC, the RDC seemed to have maintained control of coordination, holding meetings with the NGOs before their distributions and even assisting in selecting target locations and beneficiaries. In Barpak, a highly affected VDC in Gorkha district, the VDC secretary said that non-governmental organizations inform the RDC about their plans. However, they do not otherwise coordinate, reportedly choosing to work directly with villagers, especially WCF coordinators, when implementing assistance schemes.

²⁶ It is important also to consider that NGOs have reasons to be wary of local government involvement, which may translate into directing aid based on unreliable data and political interference.



Chapter 4.

Politics and Leadership

Photo: Subhash Lamichhane

- Political parties have been less involved in relief and recovery activities since the end of the emergency relief phase.
- Political parties did not appear to have formulated distinct policies relating to the recovery and reconstruction process or conducted their own reconstruction programs.
- Preexisting local governance and political dynamics have affected earthquake recovery as local officials continue to consult with and rely on political parties for decision-making.
- Only isolated incidents of conflict between political parties and politicization of relief distribution were reported.
- The involvement of political parties in the damage assessment process was contentious as they were believed by residents to have asserted pressure on the process to influence assessments.
- The roles and responsibilities of political parties, RDCs, WCFs, and WCF coordinators going forward in the relief and recovery process have not been clearly defined.
- WCF coordinators, local philanthropists, and teachers are gradually becoming more aware of their own leadership roles, but this has not led to changes in local political dynamics yet.

Box 4.1: IRM-1 findings (June 2015) on politics and leadership

The first round of field research concluded that the impact of the earthquakes on local political dynamics and leadership was limited; no significant changes to the roles of and levels of support for political parties and their local leaders were reported. Even in places where youth or the WCF took on leadership roles during the early relief phase, the existing party

leadership remained largely unchallenged. Further, political parties did not conduct any political activities specifically related to the earthquakes. They were, however, heavily involved in relief distribution committees at the district and VDC levels and in some places were found to have conducted their own relief and reconstruction efforts. Local government

officials generally relied on political parties to collectively take decisions and address conflicts related to relief distribution – through meetings functioning in a similar way to the All Party Mechanism. In general, there was little evidence that relief was politicized along party lines.

There were some indications, however, that politicization of relief and reconstruction efforts could increase over time, and political parties were often accused of influencing the outcome of damage and needs assessments.

4.1. Role of political parties

Political party activities in the post-monsoon period

Overall the dynamics between political parties and local officials have remained the same since the earthquakes.

Local officials continue to consult political parties in order to carry out their responsibilities. Since political parties continue to be involved in local governance at the district and VDC levels, they also exert some influence over local level decisions on relief distribution. However, the role is not formal or clear in most cases.

The formal engagement of political parties in relief distribution has reduced since the emergency relief period ended.

The involvement of political parties in the relief and recovery activities after the 2015 monsoon has changed both in substance and depth of engagement. During the winter relief distribution, political parties were not as directly engaged as they had been in the initial distribution phase.²⁷ This is likely due to the fact that by the winter, relief distribution had become more of a logistical effort than one of decision-making. As political parties were initially influencing decision-making through their involvement in RDCs, their engagement reduced once RDCs became less active (see Chapter 3.3).

Political parties were not conducting programs specifically related to the earthquakes nor planning any of their own activities for the recovery and reconstruction process.

The nature and level of political activities in earthquake-affected areas was largely similar to pre-earthquake times. The fact that the Nepali Congress party organized local conventions across the nation in February perhaps demonstrated the normalization of political party activities. With political parties focusing on their general activities and the reconstruction phase yet to begin, there were no clear or comprehensive efforts by political parties to form platforms to undertake activities to address issues related to recovery and reconstruction. Political parties were not found to have organized earthquake-related programs at the district headquarters, nor in the VDCs visited during the research period.

Over time, this may change and political activities in earthquake-affected areas may increase. In May 2016, the NRA issued guidelines on the mobilization of local volunteers from various organizations and political parties to coordinate between earthquake-affected people, local government, and other stakeholders in the distribution of funds, as well as to build and improve temporary shelters.²⁸ In addition, the May 2016 Post-Disaster Recovery Framework proposes the establishment of a District Coordination Committee (DCC) to coordinate and monitor reconstruction in each of the 31 affected districts under the leadership of a Member of Parliament (MP) from the same district.²⁹ Involvement of local political party volunteers and MPs in the reconstruction process allows political parties to get more directly involved. As these bodies were not in place at the time of the field research, it is unclear what impact they might have.

²⁷ The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal, Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (June 2015).

²⁸ <http://myrepublica.com/politics/story/42398/nra-issues-guidelines-for-volunteer-mobilization.html>

²⁹ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PDRF%20Report_FINAL10May.pdf



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Political parties have not formulated organized relief responses within their parties, or provided clear guidance to district and VDC-level members on how to engage local relief mechanisms.

In general, political parties seem to have had little or no organized response to the earthquakes. Some national level political leaders have made statements or public comments on government relief and reconstruction policy, but these have fallen short of coordinated party responses or policy platforms. While party

leaders at the local levels were active in DDRCs and RDCs, there was no indication that these local leaders were guided by specific or coordinated policies from within their parties. Interviews with local party committees and leaders confirmed that there were no clear instructions or coordination messages from district party offices or national party leaders regarding relief and recovery activities. Rather, local political leaders operated on the basis of their individual judgment and capacity drawing on their existing roles and levels of influence in their communities.

Political parties and local government bodies

Local officials regularly consulted political party representatives for decisions on local governance and the relief and recovery process.

This influence of local political leaders in the post-earthquake recovery period is consistent with recent practice in local governance in Nepal. In the absence of elected local political representatives in the districts, VDCs and wards, the role of political parties in local governance has long been informal and therefore without clear identification of their roles and responsibilities.³⁰ Nevertheless, they have generally worked closely with local bureaucrats – both before and after the earthquakes. The role of the parties in local decision-making was somewhat more formalized after the earthquakes, through their inclusion in the DDRCs and RDCs, which in most locations included the former members of the now defunct All Party Mechanisms (APM),³¹ bodies that were previously used for local decision-making. Through these coordination bodies, political parties played an important role assisting overburdened local bureaucrats in planning and executing the government's immediate relief and recovery programs, and mediating earthquake-affected people's grievances with the state.³²

During the second round of field research, political parties were reported to still be involved in DDRCs and RDCs, although these bodies were less active compared to the pre-monsoon period last year. Generally, it was major political parties rather than smaller ones that exerted influence in the relief distribution mechanisms. Across all locations, the presence of the three largest political parties in Nepal—Nepali Congress

(NC), Communist Party of Nepal—Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), and Unified Communist Party of Nepal—Maoist (UCPN-M)—was clearly visible.³³ In the districts of Sindhupalchowk and Ramechhap, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) was also fairly significant.

At the district headquarters, the Chief District Officer (CDO) led the relief and recovery process. Generally, in most locations visited the CDO and political parties were reported to have been more influential in DDRC decision making than the Local Development Officer (LDO). At the district level there were no major problems associated with political party involvement in the DDRC raised in the research areas. As noted already, however, political party involvement at the district level is likely to increase once the new DCCs are formed, giving a formal role to the MPs from the district that will chair these meetings on a rotational basis.³⁴

VDC secretaries, in particular, relied on political parties, WCFs and other stakeholders to carry out their responsibilities, including earthquake relief and recovery work.

The role of VDC secretaries was critical during the disaster response as the VDC centers were key hubs for relief efforts.³⁵ Despite this, in 14 out of the 18 VDCs and municipalities visited by researchers, the VDC Secretary did not live in the VDC. It is fairly common practice for VDC secretaries to choose to live in the district headquarters rather than base themselves in the VDC center.³⁶ Even though residents of many

³⁰ The administrative units of local governance in Nepal operate at three levels: district, municipality/Village Development Committee, and wards. District Development Committee (DDC), Municipality/Village Development Committee (VDC), and Ward Committee are supposed to be run by elected officials with the help of centrally and locally appointed bureaucrats. However, local elections have not been held in Nepal since 1997. As such, government-appointed bureaucrats, such as Local Development Officers (LDOs) at the DDCs, Chief Executive Officers at municipalities, and VDC Secretaries in VDCs, lead local governance.

³¹ In 2007, after the end of the Maoist insurgency, the All Party Mechanism was instituted to promote political consensus at the local level and to formally assist local officials to carry out their responsibilities. However, after widespread allegations of corruption and a recommendation of the Commission on the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA), the APM system was disbanded in January 2012. Nevertheless, political parties continue to influence the local governance process in an informal capacity. Local Governance in Nepal: Public Perceptions and Participation, The Carter Center, February 2014.

³² Political parties were most active and influential during the early relief phase. The mechanisms and levels of influence of political parties over decision-making, however, were not uniform. They varied from research area to research area, depending on

factors such as pre-earthquake influence over local government decision-making, the authority of the VDC Secretary, and the engagement of other local leaders and citizens, among others. The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal, Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (June 2015).

³³ In the last Constituent Assembly elections, NC won six, UCPN-M won five, and CPN-UML won three constituencies in the six districts visited for this research.

³⁴ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PDRF%20Report_FINAL10May.pdf

³⁵ In late March 2016, VDC secretaries reportedly protested because of the reconstruction workload and related issues in several districts, demanding to be paid similarly to other government officials working on earthquake recovery and reconstruction under the NRA. In mid-April, they resumed work after the government increased their pay through a performance-related scheme. <http://myrepublica.com/politics/story/40691/govt-announces-incentive-scheme-for-vdc-secretaries.html>

³⁶ When the Maoist insurgency began in 1996, many VDC secretaries left their posts for fear of being targeted by the Maoist revolutionaries. The insurgency ended in 2006, but many secretaries did not return to their posts full time.



Photo: Alok Pokharel

VDCs were accustomed to not having VDC secretaries at the VDC office, in the aftermath of the earthquakes their absence was identified as presenting challenges for the relief and recovery process. In one example in Lisankhu VDC, Sindhupalchowk district, earthquake-affected persons who were eligible to receive winter relief distributed through the VDC Secretary reported that they could not claim this government support, and blamed the absence of the VDC Secretary for this. In locations where VDC secretaries were generally present, residents reported that they carried out their role in the relief work without controversy, and no dissatisfaction with those VDC secretaries was expressed. Only in Aarukharka VDC in Syangja district was the role of the VDC Secretary directly criticized during interviews after some eligible households were not given winter relief materials.

Faced with the increased workload and with limited human resources in VDC offices, VDC secretaries relied on their relations with WCFs, political parties, schoolteachers and local youths to help execute their responsibilities. This has not been observed as resulting in any changes in local leadership or relative

influence yet, but the local leaders that emerged during the earthquake recovery might eventually play a larger role in local politics and governance.

At the VDC level, local political party leaders generally worked closely with VDC secretaries and other stakeholders as members of the RDCs. Through the RDCs, political parties were able to exert influence over local level decisions on relief distribution, particularly during the early relief phase. In some places, local party members were formally given leadership roles on the coordination committees. In addition to this standard practice, there were also cases of political parties working on relief in parallel to the RDC mechanisms. In six VDCs studied (Baruwa, Syaule, Lisankhu, Doramba, Dhuwakot, and Waling municipality), political parties were directly involved—not through the RDC mechanisms—in the early weeks after the earthquakes in the collection and distribution of relief materials to earthquake-affected communities. And in Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, local political leaders worked together to create a village level relief and distribution committee (Lisankhu Relief and Distribution Committee) that sometimes

worked in parallel to the official RDC. This creation of a separate mechanism was an exception, however, and political parties generally worked through DDRRC and RDC mechanisms in almost all research areas.

Political parties often facilitated better communication between the VDC and the district levels.

As aid flows have slowed, the nature of political party involvement in earthquake recovery has been increasingly focused on policy discussions in DDRRC, RDC, or VDC meetings, as well as facilitating communication between local VDC residents and government officials at the district level. Local interlocutors in 11 VDCs specifically mentioned that political parties were serving as communication channels between the VDC residents and the district headquarters. Political parties were sufficiently organized to have been able to have listened to local needs through their representatives at the ward and VDC level, and then communicate that information to stakeholders at the district headquarters through their participation in DDRRC and other meetings. Similarly, these communication channels within political parties were also at times useful for informing local citizens about decisions made at the district headquarters and in Kathmandu.

Only isolated incidents of conflict between political parties and of politicization of relief distribution were reported so far.

The similarities between RDCs and the APMs has ensured the collective influence of major political parties at the VDC and ward levels, rather than one party dominating affairs. In addition, this is a well-established system for discussion and building

consensus that local actors are used to. So the use of this structure for relief coordination helps explain why there have been very few incidents of open conflict between political parties.

Further, political parties have been able to actively police each other when any one political party has tried to distribute relief materials on its own. For example, when CPN-UML directly distributed relief in Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchowk without going through the appropriate coordination channels in the VDC, other political parties, including NC and UCPN (Maoist), accused CPN-UML of politicizing aid and distributing materials only to its own party supporters. Similarly, in Doramba VDC in Ramechhap district, the RPP tried to directly distribute relief materials to local citizens but was prevented from doing so by local NC and CPN-UML party members. In most locations this kind of intervention was not needed as political parties generally worked together to distribute aid and prevent any one political party from using relief efforts to gain an advantage.

This did not mean, however, that there were no complaints about politicization of relief. In some locations, community members complained that relief distribution coordinated by RDCs only targeted the supporters of certain political parties (Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchowk, Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga). In addition, there were reports of one case of embezzlement of government funds by a local political leader (Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchowk). Political parties were also reported to have directly put pressure on local government officials, especially at the VDC level, on behalf of their supporters or members. For example, in Syaule VDC, the VDC secretary openly noted that there had been “political pressure” in the decision-making process for relief efforts.

Involvement in damage assessments

There were frequent complaints about political parties influencing the outcome of damage assessments.

The involvement of political parties in the coordination and distribution of aid was generally seen as positive in most areas visited during the research. In contrast, political party involvement in damage assessments was viewed much more negatively. Claims of interference, the use of influence, and unfair treatment during assessments due to political party involvement were frequently raised during the research.

In Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, and Sindhupalchowk districts, the role of political parties in damage assessments was particularly contentious as multiple residents of these districts attributed inflated or

understated damage assessments to political party favoritism and politicization of the assessment process. In Doramba VDC in Ramechhap district, local residents told researchers that political parties had actively worked to push VDC officials to include as many households as they could under the category of fully damaged houses; as a result, all households in Doramba were assessed as fully damaged despite many houses having suffered little or no damage. Similarly, in Bamtibhandar VDC, an inflated assessment of damages reportedly resulted from active pressure from political parties to urge that all houses be classified as fully damaged. Some respondents in Ramechhap district speculated that this pressure on the damage assessment process was a tactic by local political leaders to expand their influence.

There were also cases in which local respondents felt that political parties had not only influenced assessments to increase the reported damage, but also to exclude or discriminate against specific households. In Ramechhap municipality, a farmer stated that “many people were not able to get proper damage assessment because of political affiliations and other political reasons.” Similarly, in Okhaldhunga district a Dalit community residing in Katunje VDC told researchers that despite the heavy damage sustained by their houses, most houses owned by Dalits had only been assessed as partially damaged. This was perceived by this community as resulting from favoritism and discrimination by political parties.

While these kinds of complaints or concerns were common, it should be noted that inflated or inadequate assessments were not always necessarily the result of political party interference. In Solukhumbu district, there is evidence of consistently inflated assessments of damage across the VDCs visited with no corresponding reports of political party influence over decisions relating to damage assessment. In Syangja district, there were complaints that damage assess-

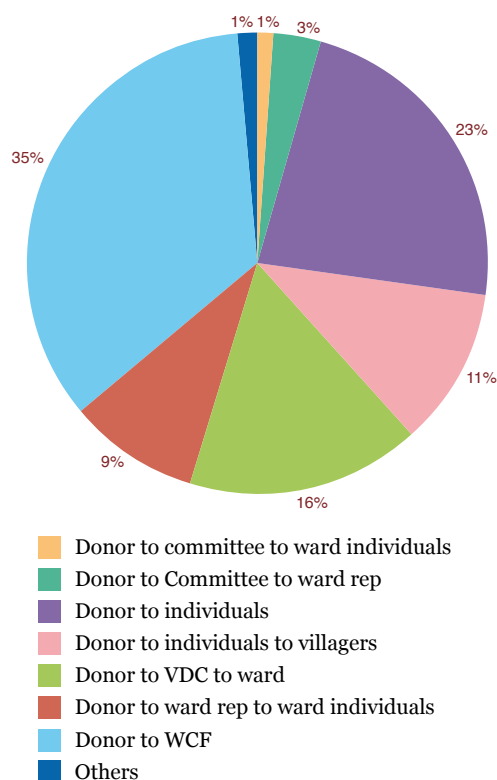
ments were too conservative. But those complaining from Aarukharka and Shreekrishna VDCs did not blame political interferences for this, seeing instead the actions of VDC secretaries as problematic.

Contentious and politicized damage assessments generally did not impact the standing of political parties among community members.

While the outcomes of damage assessments were contentious, and researchers regularly heard complaints from community members, overall the involvement of political parties was not necessarily viewed as unwelcome or undesirable. Indeed, it was local residents themselves who would raise their concerns with local party representatives if they were dissatisfied with the assessment. These behaviors are in line with the general pattern of local governance in Nepal, where people—even without local elections—still consider political party representatives to be *de facto* leaders of VDCs and wards, while often absent and frequently rotating VDC secretaries often lack legitimacy among local citizens.

Interaction with non-government bodies

Figure 4.1: Aid delivery pathways used by non-governmental organizations



Local political party leaders were regularly engaged by NGOs to support targeting and planning of local aid distribution.

Local party affiliates were seen by NGOs as being able to effectively communicate local needs, as well as serve as a channel of communication to local residents. As such, leaders of local parties were considered vital by NGOs in the managing and planning of relief work, from the initial relief phase onwards. In Sindhupalchowk district, there was a clear pattern of NGOs delivering relief materials through locally influential individuals, WCF members, or ward representatives who were all often politically affiliated. Overall less than 5% of NGO aid schemes routed their support through the more formal RDCs (see Figure 4.1), compared with more than 70% that worked through influential actors at the local level. Research did not find evidence of significant cases of frustration with the role played by political parties in supporting NGO aid distribution, or any other evidence that this engagement negatively impacted the aid delivered.

4.2. Emergence of new leadership

In the districts and wards visited, there was no evidence that political party engagement with relief work had led to new forms of political leadership, or challenged existing political dynamics.

Despite earthquake-affected persons harboring frustrations against political parties—for their role in inaccurate and unfair damage assessments, and other delays in reconstruction—there was also no indication of a strong backlash against the engagement of political parties. Indeed, it was observed that many community

members faced with specific challenges or complaints would proactively seek out political leaders to request their help resolving the problem. The post-earthquake role of political parties might be seen as having reaffirmed and entrenched the role of the local political elite in many ways, even with the frustrations that have been expressed. So the political elements in relief and reconstruction have largely continued unchanged, with existing local governance and political dynamics affecting the relief and recovery efforts rather than the disaster response leading to significant changes to the existing system and hierarchy.

Ward Citizen Forums and other local actors

People at the ward level showed increasing awareness of the importance of the WCF and the WCF coordinators.

Citizens in the wards visited reported an increasing sense of the potential importance of WCF coordinators and their roles as local leaders. In 12 VDCs, the researchers observed that the WCF had been an important local institution during relief and recovery and that WCF Coordinators took on leadership roles while implementing relief and recovery efforts. A few WCF coordinators also echoed this sentiment. A WCF coordinator in Bamtibhandar VDC in Ramechhap district said: “the earthquakes made us realize that we also have important responsibilities in the ward. Our responsibilities are similar to that of the ward chairman.”³⁷

In wards where the researchers observed a more limited presence of political parties, such as in parts of Gorkha district, including Barpak VDC, WCF coordinators were relatively more active in the planning and distribution of relief. While it is unclear if this emerging role will have any lasting effect on local political or governance dynamics, it could potentially build towards greater relevance for WCF members in the future if community members continue to seek them out for support on various local issues. While it is important to note the potential, it is too early to suggest that there has been a change in leadership patterns in the wards visited. First, there is still no indication that the WCF Coordinators across the visited districts have fully taken on leadership roles. Second, the influence of WCF Coordinators does not seem to be as apparent in wards that have a strong presence of political parties. Third, the WCF members were focused on aid

delivery and implementation, but remained marginal in actual decision-making.

Informal local leaders including general citizens, teachers, saving and credit cooperative officials, philanthropists, and business people, became involved in the relief and recovery process.

For example, researchers found that the president of the chamber of commerce in Waling municipality in Syangja, the president of a saving and cooperative in Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchowk, and a school teacher in Bamtibhandar VDC in Ramechhap were each being viewed in the aftermath of the earthquakes as key local leaders by residents of their communities. There is no clear indication at this point to suggest that those individuals will go on to take leadership roles throughout the recovery process, but the possibility is there. Whether some of these individuals take on political roles will not be known until the next local elections take place.

Without a clear definition of their roles and responsibilities, emerging leaders in the community have not been able to be effectively involved in the relief and recovery process, and have often been sidelined by other actors.

The poorly defined role of new actors, including WCFs and WCF coordinators, in the planning and policy development processes still undermines their ability to assume leadership roles at the local level in the future. The increase in public awareness of the potential leadership role of WCF coordinators and other local individuals had limited power to significantly alter local dynamics. This will only happen if rising influence leads to more formal and significant roles and responsibilities.

³⁷ The Ward Chairman is the highest ranking elected representative in a ward.



Chapter 5. Social Relations and Conflict

Photo: Amanda Gurung

- ▶ 27 out of 36 wards studied reported consistent or improved social relations within their communities since the earthquakes.
- ▶ No significant incidents of violence relating to the earthquakes and recovery process were found.
- ▶ Frustrations with relief distribution and resettlement are most commonly directed at decision-makers, and less frequently at neighbors.
- ▶ Displacement and resettlement was the issue that caused the most tension, but there were both examples of communities and local officials that handled this process well, as well as places where it was not effectively managed.
- ▶ Aid distribution caused tension in some communities when it was targeted at certain segments of the population, especially when others had also suffered significant impact from the earthquakes.
- ▶ Resentment over perceived and actual discrimination relating to caste and ethnicity were often voiced, revealing that these categories and issues of structural discrimination continue to affect social relations and aid distribution.
- ▶ Crimes were not reported to have increased during the monsoon or winter.

Box 5.1: IRM-1 findings (June 2015) on social relations and conflict

Intra-community solidarity was reported to be high in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, and no major conflicts were described in VDCs visited. Pre-existing modes of cooperation and the even distribution of relief materials were highlighted as contributing to community solidarity at the start of the monsoon season. There was no evidence of willful discrimination in the distribution of resources. Nevertheless,

some groups still felt discriminated against, and resentment over perceived inequality was sometimes talked about with references to caste, ethnicity, or religion. This indicated the potential for increased social tension in the future. 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. Findings from June 2015 also found indications of resentment surrounding temporary resettlement solutions and recommended

consultations with all stakeholder on future resettlement policies in VDCs in order to avoid tensions and conflicts.

5.1. Overall social relations

Out of 36 wards in the study, 27 wards reported that overall social cohesion did not deteriorate after the earthquakes.

Most communities maintained good social relations after the earthquakes, despite being under multiple pressures, and this trend was largely observed to have continued in the communities studied after the monsoon during the second round of research. This observation was based on respondents in these 27 wards directly reporting to researchers that they believed social relations within their community had not changed or had improved. This did not mean that there were no complaints about damage assessments or feelings of unfairness. There were several conditions and situations that had the potential to increase ten-

sions and lead to the deterioration of social relations, but respondents' responses indicate that most communities have been able to overcome these challenges without significant decreases in social cohesion.

Despite this general trend, there were some wards (six of 36) studied in which respondents indicated that social cohesion had shown signs of deteriorating, but in no communities had disagreements, complaints, or real or perceived discrimination escalated to the level of open conflict. In addition to those six wards, there were three other wards where at least some tensions, resentment, or suspicions between ethnic or caste groups were reported. All wards where decreasing social cohesion or tensions were observed were in severely hit or crisis hit districts (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Assessment of trends in social relations post-earthquake by ward respondents

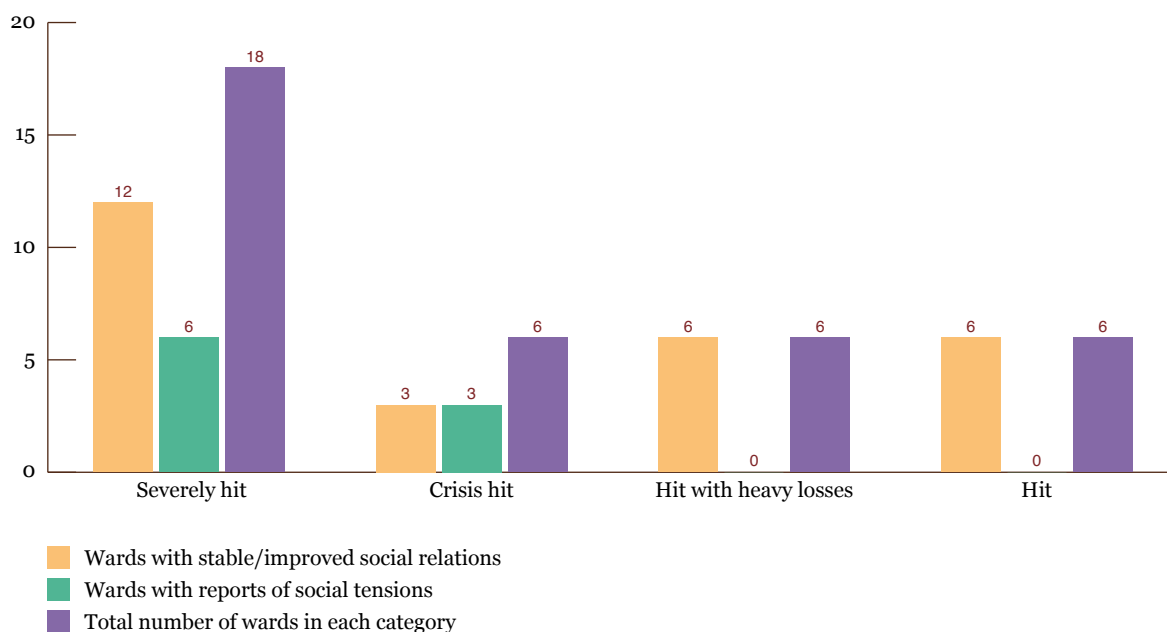




Photo: Alok Pokharel

Residents in seven wards claimed that social relations had improved after the earthquakes and attributed this to a spirit of cooperation and communal living as they coped with challenges in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes.

In Ramechhap, people in Bamtibhandar Ward 1 and Doramba Ward 3 told the research team that the earthquakes brought people with personal and political rivalries together to help each other. In some wards, villagers became closer from sharing temporary shelter. For example, in Doramba Ward 5, a group of Magars reported feeling closer to Tamangs in the community after sharing shelter. Similarly, Hayu women in Ramechhap municipality Ward 5 shared their experiences of living together and said that the earthquakes had brought them closer together.

In Baruwā Ward 5, Sindhupalchowk district, around 8085 families from five wards lived communally under one shelter during the initial days after the earthquakes. They reported that it was helpful to be surrounded by kind neighbors after the devastating experience and recounted how they had shared a meal of 60 kg of mixed porridge among themselves equally. The group also used a system of rotating labor exchanges to build temporary shelters, clear rubble

and resume farming. In several cases, people also provided low interest loans to affected neighbors, for example, in Aarukharka Ward 6 in Syangja.

Some cases of solidarity included cooperation across traditional caste boundaries. For example, Gurung families in Aarukharka Ward 8 allowed six displaced Dalit families to live in their unoccupied homes right after the earthquakes and for the whole monsoon. One family still remained in a Gurung house at the time of the second field visit. These examples cannot, however, be said to indicate any consistent breaking down of traditional social structures and barriers in impacted areas, in fact the research teams found as many negative anecdotes involving caste discrimination as positive ones. The incidents of cooperation mostly took place in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes and several months after the disaster citizens had turned to focus again on their own lives. Despite residents reporting the positive impact from having worked together to support victims of the earthquakes, the lasting impact on social relations is unclear.

Social tensions and conflicts were observed in nine wards in severely hit and crisis hit districts. However, this did not lead to open conflict or violence in any of the wards.



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Some wards in severely hit and crisis hit districts (9 out of 36 visited)³⁸ reported tensions around earthquake relief and recovery (see Figure 5.1 above). The cases involved three issues: (i) displacement and resettlement; (ii) perceived discrimination or unfair treatment in relief distribution; and (iii) conflict over scarce water. Observed conflicts and tensions, with the exception of the case related to water resources, generally involved friction between a minority (ethnic, caste, displaced persons) and a majority group. Several cases had a perceived caste or ethnic dimension to them, with discrimination against Dalits, low-caste community members, or involving tension between ethnic groups.

Given this, it is clear that caste and ethnic inequality remain salient feature in the society and this has contributed to some post-earthquake social tensions. So far, no cases have been observed in which the earthquakes and subsequent responses (both positive and negative) have clearly impacted existing prejudices or hierarchies in a lasting way. Instead, existing social dynamics are affecting relief and recovery. While these tensions are present, conflict and disagreements

remained limited to verbal confrontation or complaints and resentment. In no cases did field researchers find evidence of escalation and violence.

Scarce water sources affect farming and water consumption and can cause conflicts.

While distribution of aid and relief and displacement were the most frequent causes of tension cited during field research, scarcity of water is an emerging issue. Disruption of water sources, damage to irrigation systems, and shortages of drinking water were reported in multiple areas in four out of the six districts studied. While this clearly affects livelihoods and daily life, there are also signs that it has the potential to cause conflict between residents. In Lisankhu Ward 3, Sindhupalchowk, water sources have been diverted or have dried up after the earthquakes and drinking water has become an urgent need. This scarcity, and the challenges of accessing water, was leading to tense relationships between women who are responsible for collecting water for their households. Frequent disputes during water collection were reported. While this level of disruption and dispute was reported in just one ward among 36 wards studied, delayed attention to the water needs of affected communities has the potential to lead to more conflict in the future.

³⁸ Of the 36 wards visited, 24 were in severely hit and crisis hit districts.

5.2. Displacement and relocation: effects on social relations

Among those with damaged houses, there is a strong preference for staying close to their land and communities.

Most residents with fully and partially damaged houses have constructed temporary shelters on their own land or continued to live in their repaired or still damaged houses. Others have rented land from neighbors and relatives. There is a strong preference of people to stay close to their own land and in their own communities. Even under the most adverse physical circumstances, displaced persons generally chose to remain in their home VDC, citing as the reasons a lack of financial resources needed to move as well as a desire to remain on ancestral land as a way to stay connected to their community, history, and culture. As a Tamang farmer from Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchowk district said, “Even if I die, I will die in the place where I was born. So, during the monsoon, when other people left for Kathmandu, I didn’t leave.” He and most of those whose houses were completely destroyed or severely damaged constructed temporary shelters. Most temporary shelters were constructed on people’s own land, sometimes in partially destroyed or repaired homes. Many others built temporary shelters on land rented from relatives or neighbors – this was most common where residents lived in landslide-prone areas that made their own land potentially dangerous. Despite this, there are a significant number of affected households who have had to live in rented property or communal shelters, mostly in the hardest hit areas, and sometimes outside of their own VDCs.

Other than in the low impact Syangja district, where most affected people have already returned to their homes, across the districts studied most people still live in self-constructed, temporary shelters. Given the time that has passed, these shelters have, in many cases, been made somewhat sturdier than was the case immediately after the earthquakes. Yet, in Gorkha, Okhaldhunga, and Solukhumbu, many of those living in temporary shelters decided to move back into damaged houses after aftershocks subsided. This trend was explained by the immense challenges of living in temporary shelters during strong winds and rain during the monsoon and the extreme cold in winter. Some of those that moved back managed to fix or at least stabilize their homes, sometimes by removing the second floor. Respondents thought that some had moved back despite knowing that there was some risk that their house could collapse.

There were no disputes reported related to negotiations around private land rental or sharing within communities.

Renting land or houses from neighbors or relatives within or near to one’s home VDC or ward did not lead to any reports of tension or conflict, nor did the rent-free sharing of land or houses. The ability to negotiate for accommodation appeared instead to indicate good relations between neighbors. For example, in Aarukharka VDC in Syangja, six Dalit families lived in unused Gurung houses. Another case, in Bamtibhandar VDC in Ramechhap, saw displaced relatives from outside the VDC accommodated without conflict. Other displaced persons from within Bamtibhandar VDC were also able to move to safer land belonging to their neighbors. Since the VDC is predominately inhabited by Chettri families, displaced Chettri families reportedly faced no problems during relocation.

In the absence of government-led resettlement plans and geographic land safety assessments, citizens whose land had been rendered unsafe were left to decide whether to stay put or relocate; many who could afford to sought shelter in urban centers.

Prior to the start of the 2015 monsoon, there was much uncertainty about the government’s long-term resettlement plans and when they would be implemented. Out of the six districts visited for the research, only the Sindhupalchowk District Administration Office had prepared for the inevitable monsoon-related displacement by renting land in the district headquarters to provide space for temporary camps. Sometimes, displaced persons were directed to settle on land selected by local village leaders, including VDC office staff and political party members. For the most part, however, people were left to choose where to settle themselves. The decision to leave one’s land was complicated for many households by the absence of geological assessments, which would have informed citizens whether or not their land was safe to reside on during the monsoon. Many of those who did seek other locations to live were residents of places that had experienced cracks and landslides due to recent earthquakes or that were landslide-prone. Among the displaced, the research found many stories about households who had left their VDCs for the district headquarters and urban centers such as Kathmandu and Pokhara, finding shelter with relatives, renting rooms, or setting up homes in IDP camps. Those who moved into houses in urban

areas were families who could afford the costs of the trip and the higher accommodation prices. For those who moved to urban IDP camps, the situation was clearly different, and their choices were likely linked to perceptions of higher income earning possibilities and better services. These factors pull migrants into urban areas even in normal times.

Citizens relocating without adequate consultation with local officials or with the wider community created tension in some locations.

In Syaule Ward 8 in Sindhupalchowk, some tension was generated when 19 families moved from Dadagaun because of fears of landslides. They set up shelters on the main road into the VDC, occupying potentially valuable commercial land and naming the location Naya Basti. Although they reached out to the RDC to seek permission from the DDC for the resettlement, and were still awaiting an answer at the time of the research, other VDC residents thought they were being opportunistic and intentionally using the earthquakes as an excuse to permanently occupy the land. Naming their settlement Naya Basti only strengthened the suspicion that they were planning to settle there permanently. Other villagers, including those from a nearby settlement called Kerabari, resented this, accusing the people from Dadagaun of relocating without having been at real risk, and of planning to exploit the economic opportunity of occupying land on the main road.

Since Kerabari residents had also experienced deaths during the earthquakes due to landslides and had also suffered from landslide problems before the earthquakes, their frustration was heightened. Those interviewed explained that households in their community had already filed a claim for resettlement before the earthquakes. They strongly felt that they had suffered more damage than the Naya Basti residents who were poised to benefit economically by establishing a new settlement on the main road of the VDC. Given these tensions, people in Naya Basti kept hearing rumors in the village that they would have to move soon and that the owners of the land on which they had settled planned to sell the land. As an official decision on their settlement was pending, the relations between the Naya Basti residents and the rest of the village were found to be very poor.

Even with intervention from government offices to provide communal shelter to the displaced, tensions in some cases resulted from existing social relations and hierarchies, especially untouchability.

The second phase of research was able to follow-up on reports from the last round that a Dalit community, which was resettled in Okhaldhunga, had been facing

discrimination.³⁹ The first round of research reported that residents from Prapcha Ward 9 were forced to seek temporary shelter in other wards as their homes were fully destroyed and the DDRRC, with advice from official geologists, suggested that they should resettle in different locations because of landslide risk. The displaced included Brahmins and Dalits. Their relations deteriorated quickly after a communal shelter was arranged by the DDRRC in Ward 3 for their initial relocation. Brahmin families refused to move into the shelter alongside the Dalits. Approximately twenty Dalit families stayed in the shelter through the monsoon, whereas the Brahmin families moved onto land owned by family members in other parts of the VDC. The decision on the relocation was also made without consent of people living in the surrounding area who were predominantly Brahmins and Chettri. Within a few weeks, these residents started to complain that the shelter occupied the only public space in VDC and that they had not been consulted about its use.

In this round, the research team found that due to pressure from the community, including verbal threats, the Dalit families had left the communal shelters at the end of the monsoon and shifted to cowsheds built on rented lands in Ward 5, where they lived alongside cattle. This group expressed a desire to be able to use the communal shelter during the coming monsoon season, but feared that they would not be allowed to do so. When they had previously tried to return to the shelter, they had been asked to leave and not to return. Within this ward there were some other displaced families who declined the DDRRC's offer to share the communal shelter with the Dalits, choosing instead to remain in small shelters on neighbors' land, land that suffers from the risk of landslides. The public space, Deurali Daanda, was the only space deemed fit to build this shelter in the VDC, limiting the possibilities for a simple solution to the disagreement.

Another incident in Barpak VDC in Gorkha was reported by an informant at the district level, who mentioned that the occupation of land designated for the construction of a health post by displaced Dalit families had raised community concerns. Complaints were received about those Dalit families living rent free while others had to pay rent. Although this case was not elaborated on by any residents in the VDC, it does further indicate that tensions emerged in some cases as a result of a combination of discrimination and resettlement.

³⁹ This story features as Case Study 5.1 on page 69 of the IRM Phase 1 Qualitative Research Report. The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal (2015). *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (June 2015)*. Kathmandu and Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.



Photo: Binu Sharma

Ongoing displacement is a potential source of conflict in communities where resettlement was tolerated because it was to be temporary.

The unplanned nature of resettlement during the 2015 monsoon, particularly concerning the use of public land, has produced friction in some communities, which was expressed variously from resentment through to outright caste discrimination. Across the board, even in places where the use of public land has yet to cause conflict, accommodating displaced persons on both private and public land was regarded as a temporary solution for the previous monsoon.

As residents of Barpak in Gorkha district relate, they were happy to let others live on their land rent free initially, but they are unable to do so indefinitely. This is a potential source of future conflict, given that another monsoon season is fast approaching and the majority of displaced families have not yet built or repaired permanent homes. Land for temporary resettlement will continue to be needed throughout 2016 and potentially permanently in some cases. This will require negotiation and planning to allow for lasting solutions that do not disrupt community relations.

5.3. Discrimination and uneven access to relief

Complaints about access to relief, targeting, damage assessments, and other issues were consistent with those reported during the first round of research. Most frustrations were directed at decision-makers, and less frequently at neighbors, and in no cases in the 36 wards studied did these complaints lead to violent conflict.

In many locations studied, residents voiced complaints about damage assessments and the resulting beneficiary list, or that relief received was insufficient. In some places, there were also perceptions of unfair distribution based on location, caste, and perceived political bias, which led to suspicions that others were gaining from better access to relief. Complaints in recent months might, in part, be linked to the fact that relief distribution is slowing and the volume of aid has decreased since the 2015 monsoon. It is unclear the extent to which perceptions of bias reflect actual biases in distribution.

The distribution that did take place—winter relief schemes and cash grants in certain areas—resulted at times in tensions regarding distribution, often based on pre-existing complaints. In general, no evidence was found of outright confrontations. Instead, differences in the kind, quality, and frequency of relief provided to different sections with society were noted by VDC residents, and are potential sources of future tension.

Specific examples of complaints included a number of cases in which more remotely located communities felt that their access to aid was less than that of more easily accessible wards. Examples included residents of Barpak wards 1, 2, and 3, in Gorkha, who felt marginalized by relief distribution. People believed that those who lived around the VDC office took most of the relief materials before it could reach their hands. Similarly, in Okhaldhunga, residents in Baruneshwor Ward 1 also suspected that more relief went to other VDCs. In Katunje Ward 4 in Okhaldhunga district, people thought that relief did not reach them because their village was not easily reached by road and so materials were grabbed by Brahmins living closer to the relief distribution center in Ward 1. Residents of remote areas of Syaule Ward 1, Sindhupalchowk, had a similar fear and reported being dissatisfied with the relief distribution as they believed that they had missed out.

In some instances, caste inequality also contributed to perceptions of discrimination. Katunje VDC Ward 1 in Okhaldhunga is a primarily Dalit community.

Here, Dalit residents felt that despite receiving significant relief and attention from relief providers, arguably more than some other communities, that no one listened to their opinions and that they had been discriminated against in relief and the damage assessments. In Dhuwakot Ward 9, Gorkha, perceived discrimination was thought to have had a negative impact on the already lukewarm relations between Dalits and other communities. Dalits felt that Brahmins and other residents had better access to relief and the best materials because the relief was dropped off in Sera Bazaar, an area where residents were mostly from high caste families. Dalits had to be called down from their uphill settlement whenever relief arrived and expressed their belief that the ‘intellectuals and knowledgeable ones’ took relief overnight from where it was stored, leaving only lower quality materials for the Dalit households. Although other residents thought the distribution was fair, the Dalits said that no-one had come to check what they needed because they lived uphill. They praised relief schemes that had clearly prioritized Dalits and viewed this kind of targeting as necessary.

Equal distribution of aid as a targeting strategy was still common and in some cases helped maintain good social relations.

Across all VDCs visited, the most common pattern of aid delivery from the RDC was even and equal distribution to all qualifying households. The rationale for this, often stated by RDC members to research teams, was concern that targeted aid might have a negative impact on social relations within communities. In most places, people were happy that all affected households received aid, even if they had endured different levels of impact. There were cases where uneven distribution led to disputes that were only resolved when the decision was taken to return to equal distribution. This happened in both Nele Ward 7, Solukhumbu, and Doramba Ward 5 in Ramechhap.

While generally viewed positively in most locations, even distribution was not universally regarded as a fair system, particularly by members of non-dominant or minority populations who perceived some discrimination. Cases included the one in Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga district, described earlier, and one in Ward 9 in Dhuwakot VDC in Gorkha district where discrimination against Dalits in the distribution of rice resulted in a public argument at the main distribution site, eventually requiring mediation by the local police. Although non-Dalit residents in this ward claimed the disagreement has been resolved, Dalits insisted that the issue remains live and they continue to feel



Photo: Tanka Gurung

resentment. In these cases, it is unclear whether the residents felt that they should have been targeted to have received more aid than others, or whether they just had concerns about relief distribution pathways which meant that aid went through segments of the local leadership who they felt has often discriminated against them in the past.

Targeted aid was welcome in some places, but it created tensions in other locations.

Aid delivered by NGOs and INGOs was more likely to be targeted and was usually distributed directly to members of “marginalized” or “vulnerable” groups, including Janajati, Dalits, women, the elderly, and children. Targeting approaches were not studied comprehensively. However, evidence was found of NGOs targeting both based on local needs assessments, as well as based on their mandate to help “marginalized” or “vulnerable” groups without reference to specific local conditions. Targeting aid at specific groups perceived as more vulnerable appeared to have caused tensions within some communities.

In some VDCs, dominant social groups articulated resentment toward neighbors from different social or ethnic groups who were the target group for a specific program’s aid. This happened in Tanglichok VDC

Ward 9 in Gorkha district, a ward that is predominately inhabited by economically disadvantaged Chepangs, within a VDC largely inhabited by Gurungs. The relatively large volume of aid targeted to the Chepangs in this ward created resentment between the two groups who were both affected by the earthquakes. Chepangs reported that they were taunted by their Gurung neighbors who said to them, “[It is like] the earthquakes came only for you [Chepangs], but we [Gurungs] are people too!”

Similarly, the feeling that the low caste Dalits are prioritized for aid over high caste Brahmin and Chettri residents was voiced by higher castes in Katunje and Baruneshwor VDCs in Okhaldhunga district. A Brahmin resident of Baruneshwor, Ward 1, explained his resentment over the distribution of materials to Dalit and indigenous residents of the ward through the frame of the caste system. He said that within his ward the Chettri and Brahmin communities needed more aid assistance compared to lower caste Dalits and Janajati groups because, despite being more privileged in the social hierarchy, Chettri and Brahmin communities do not have regular jobs to earn cash incomes. He explained, “We cannot go to work as laborers because our culture and upbringing do not allow us to work for others. Neither do we have the skills and strength to work like Dalits. Dalits and other

indigenous people have a regular income and yet the external assistance and support from the government is focused on them. We also need support, but only the Dalits are prioritized. There is no equality in support and assistance.”

In Katunje VDC, Bhumi Adhikar Manch, a NGO, distributed winter relief to Dalit residents only, and the Brahmin residents of the VDC felt this action discriminated against them. Following complaints, Bhumi Adhikar Manch returned to Katunje and distributed relief materials evenly across all households in the VDC, regardless of caste or ethnicity. This

decision resolved tensions within the ward and was praised by Brahmin residents.

However, these attitudes towards targeted aid for traditionally marginalized groups were not universally held. In Waling VDC Ward 7 in Syangja district, Brahmin residents clearly stated that they believed the NGO relief targeted at Dalits in their VDC was necessary. Since the Brahmin community did not need the materials that were distributed, they had no complaints. The same opinion was also echoed in Tanglichok Ward 4, Gorkha.

Case Study 5.1: Decision not to provide aid to internal migrants causes tensions in Ramechhap

The relations between the local population and the shopkeepers of the Ratna Jyoti Bazar in Bamtibhandar Ward 3, Ramechhap, have become cold since the earthquakes. Most shopkeepers in the market were originally from outside of the area (from Solukhumbu, Dolakha, and neighboring areas). They were denied aid as they were not considered local citizens. The local RDC thought that relief and earthquake assistance should only be provided to the original citizens of the ward. The shopkeepers had been in business in this location for more than a decade, but they do not have land registration certificates since they lease the land from the government school in the ward. Researchers were told that the

lease would not expire. All of the shopkeepers received some emergency relief. But in order to receive victim identity cards and the cash grants of NPR 15,000 or 10,000, they were told that they either had to receive support from their ancestral homes or produce a document as proof that they were legally separated from their families and no longer living with their parents in their ancestral homes. The issue was resolved in June 2015 when the shopkeepers eventually received the ID cards from their original places of residence, but tensions and worsened relations remain due to the way that shopkeepers were treated in the early days of the relief efforts.

Patterns of relief distribution can exacerbate existing tensions.

A consistent observation from the field is that patterns of relief distribution have not created new forms of social tension within communities. But where preexisting prejudices exist, aid has sometimes exacerbated those prejudices. So these existing conditions are clearly affecting how relief recipients, as well as relief organizations, are perceived in the community. The few cases where communities were observed to have willingly accepted that relief would be provided only to certain sections of their society can be taken as a sign of good pre-existing social relations in these locales.

In areas where patterns of delivery are perceived negatively, it is encouraging that disputes around the

uneven nature of relief distribution—both in targeted and non-targeted programs—have not turned violent. Based on research, at the time of writing this report, there is little to indicate that resentment and frustrations over relief distribution will lead to a drastic deterioration of social relations in the VDCs visited. Yet, the cumulative effect of discrimination (actual and perceived) in access to relief, especially in areas that already experience divisions along communal lines, means there is potential for resentment and verbal disputes to escalate into intra-community conflict. In a context going forward in which aid flows are reduced, and government programs target only those who hold a beneficiary card, the challenge of perceptions created by using different targeting strategies will become more important to monitor and engage with.

5.4. Resolving disputes

Local officials and leaders often moved quickly to resolve disputes, but were not always successful.

As tensions and disputes arose in different communities there were a number of ad hoc ways in which dispute resolution took place. In some cases, perceived unfairness in aid targeting was responded to by NGOs directly, such as in the previously mentioned case in Baruneshwor VDC. But the most common actors trying to manage these disputes were local officials and leaders. Wherever arguments arose around relief distribution, political party leaders, VDC staff, and occasionally the WCF coordinators aimed to quickly resolve them, often at the behest of the disputants themselves.

For example, a human rights organization intended to distribute NPR 1,500 each to female victims and single women in Dhurkot VDC in Gorkha district, with the aid allocated for 100 people. The constituency of single women in the VDC thought the cash grant was meant only for them, failing to understand it was also intended for all female earthquake-affected

persons in the VDC. As a result, they complained about the way that the distribution had been handled. The WCF resolved this dispute through dialogue with the beneficiaries of the relief. In cases involving displacement and resettlement, these same local leaders at times played a role. However, this led to mixed results.

Where this leadership role was used effectively, it contributed to the maintenance of social relationships. However, there were also cases where local leaders were seen to have caused conflict through perceived bias when distributing relief. In Barpak VDC in Gorkha district, for example, a WCF coordinator was accused of not providing relief to Dalit families in his ward. The ward residents condemned his actions. In another case, a lingering dispute between political parties over the construction of an earthquake-damaged water supply system in a ward of Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchowk has divided community members along political party lines. Although most members of the ward in question are related to each other, the manner in which the water supply project has been handled by party leaders has created resentment.

5.5. Violence, crime, and security

While the general perception across the earthquake-affected districts is that crime rates have not increased, unconfirmed reports of increased sexual and gender-based violence need to be monitored carefully.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, additional security providers were deployed across the earthquake-affected areas, including in the six research districts. With the exception of Sindhupalchowk district, their numbers had decreased to pre-earthquake levels across all research districts by the time of the research.

In general, despite the disruptions to livelihoods and, in certain areas, to social relations, both security officers and other respondents reported that crimes did not increase during the monsoon or the winter season. It was notable that at the district and VDC level, there were also no reported incidents of trafficking found during the field research, although given that other reports have noted that trafficking may have increased after the earthquakes in areas where trafficking previously existed, the situation needs to be

monitored carefully.⁴⁰ Interestingly, security officers in the districts studied assess that the criminal activity that had been an issue in some districts prior to the earthquakes, such as robberies and illegal extraction from community forests in Gorkha district, and petty crimes in Sindhupalchowk district, had decreased since the earthquakes. One theory posited by security officials in Sindhupalchowk district is that the district's policy of deploying four police officers to patrol VDCs during the monsoon season had prevented an increase in crimes and violence.

The outlook regarding domestic violence and sexual assault is somewhat unclear, but there are potential reasons for concern. There remain incidents of these

⁴⁰ National and international media raised awareness of the trafficking of women and children after the earthquakes, focusing on districts, such as Sindhupalchowk, where the rates of trafficking are acknowledged to be high. While security officers and respondents in areas visited did not report trafficking cases, it should be regarded as a concern: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/oct/25/nepal-earthquake-six-month-anniversary-children-orphans-people-traffickers>.



Photo: Binu Sharma

types of assault, but the trend after the earthquakes is difficult to ascertain. Due to the phenomena of underreporting of sexual and gender-based violence, it is difficult to conclude whether or not these crimes have increased since the earthquakes. Many respondents throughout the research wards reported that they believed incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, had been pervasive in their communities before the earthquakes, and had remained problematic since the disaster. Official data was not able to establish a clear trend in most areas studied.

In Gorkha district, however, security officials noted that there had been a definite increase in reported

rape cases since the earthquakes. However, the security official interviewed believed that this may not signal a rise in incidents, but rather an increase in awareness within communities as a result of NGOs raising these issues when they came to the district after the earthquakes. Looking at the rape statistics collected from the District Police of Gorkha district, as many rape cases had been reported in Gorkha in the months since the monsoon as in the whole of last year. (Between four and eleven rape cases were reported in each of the last three years, while nine rape cases were reported since July/August; similarly, between three and five attempted rape cases were reported in previous years, and two attempted cases had already been reported since July/August).



Chapter 6. Protection and Vulnerability

Photo: Amanda Gurung

- ▶ Most earthquake-affected people in crisis hit and severely hit wards remained in temporary shelters during monsoon and winter, exposing them to physical hardship and illness.
- ▶ Vulnerability to illness and physical hardship was reported as being highest for those of lower economic status residing in temporary shelters, regardless of ethnicity, caste, age, or gender.
- ▶ Psychological distress continues to impact recovery in crisis hit and severely hit wards, yet no sustained psychosocial counseling programs were reported in any ward visited.
- ▶ Children and the elderly had higher incidence of illness during the monsoon and winter.
- ▶ Women, children, the elderly, the displaced, the economically disadvantaged, and those residing in temporary shelters are regarded as vulnerable by ward residents.
- ▶ The need to return to agricultural and grazing fields in order to continue livelihoods exposes displaced populations to harm from landslides.
- ▶ With the exception of sexual and gender-based violence and domestic violence, no human rights abuses were reported by security officials or ward respondents.

Box 6.1: IRM-1 findings (June 2015) on protection and vulnerability

Vulnerability increased after the earthquakes due to displacement, poor quality temporary shelters, and inadequate needs and damage assessments. Exposure, absence of geographic assessments, and feelings of insecurity while residing in temporary shelters were cited as exacerbating the vulnerability of displaced persons. The haphazard implementation of

damage assessments likewise created a situation where many were left out of beneficiary lists, impacting groups like those who rented rooms in urban areas and producing uneven relief distribution. In the first six to eight weeks after the earthquakes, women, children, and the elderly were considered to be the most vulnerable populations. Field observations

led to the prediction that structural inequalities that render individuals unable to access extra-local resources and consistently exclude

and discriminate on the basis of identity would potentially impede the recovery of marginalized populations.

6.1. Living through the monsoon and winter seasons

Physical hardship

In the absence of government guidance, permission and grants for rebuilding, most earthquake-affected households lived in temporary shelters throughout the monsoon and winter seasons, where they were vulnerable to illness, physical hardship, and negative psychological impacts.

Earthquake-affected households waited for instructions on reconstruction from the government in the months following the earthquakes. When none came, they had little choice but to make or fortify shelters with whatever materials were available and prepare for the wet monsoon and cold winter seasons ahead. As such, with the exception of Syangja district, in all wards visited the majority of individuals whose homes had suffered significant damage lived through the monsoon and winter in temporary individual or community shelters constructed variously from wood, bamboo, tarps, CGI sheets, bricks, and building materials salvaged from damaged homes. Some individuals chose to move back into their damaged homes, weighing the associated risks against the chance to have warmer, drier, and more windproof shelter. Those who could afford to remove the dangerous top floors of their houses first to lessen the risk of collapse. Those people who returned to their homes or who managed to build durable semi-permanent shelters of wood or stone reportedly did not suffer as much illness or physical hardship as those in lower quality temporary shelter.

But those who could not afford to either remove damaged portions of their homes or improve their temporary shelters had limited choices. As such, vulnerability to illness and physical hardship was reportedly highest for those of lower economic status, regardless of ethnicity, caste, age, or gender. The more economically disadvantaged lived through the monsoon and winter seasons in extreme physical

discomfort, facing issues such as leaking tarpaulins, drafty shelters, damp clothes, leech bites, and lower quality food, which led to swollen hands and faces, fevers, and coughs, among other ailments. Ill health among the earthquake-affected people was compounded by the fact that across the 36 wards visited, 25 health posts had been either partially or fully damaged by the earthquakes, affecting the ward residents' ability to access health care and medicines.⁴¹

Physical hardships were reported to have been especially high in Sindhupalchowk, Gorkha, Ramechhap, Solukhumbu, and Okhaldhunga districts. Residents of crisis hit Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, for example, had to sift through the rubble of broken homes in order to find grain and lentils to eat during the monsoon season, while families in the severely hit Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga district related their experiences of struggling to feed their children and protect them from pests and the cold.

The vulnerability of the earthquake-affected households was exacerbated by disruptions to sources of income, including loss of income from affected farming, grazing livestock, business, or industrial activities. Disruptions and loss of income was reported as a factor in 32 of the 36 wards in the study, and this impacted the ability of many individuals to raise the funds to make resilient shelters or fortify damaged homes.

⁴¹ Seven damaged health posts were reported in remote VDCs and 18 damaged health posts were reported in accessible VDCs. Four VDCs had no damage to their health post and two VDCs had already rebuilt health posts by the time of the field research.



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Psychological impacts

Earthquake trauma, uncertain futures, and practical concerns about life in shelters are sources of stress and anxiety.

The wide ranging psychological effects of the earthquakes were found to be most acute among those households living in temporary shelters. The need to provide for family members, including children and the elderly, while managing life in temporary shelters during the monsoon and winter seasons, generated stress within communities visited. A Tamang mother in Katunje VDC, Okhaldhunga district, told researchers that, “We can never cook easily in the *katero* (temporary shelter) because the wind blowing through makes it hard to make the fire, but the greatest challenge is the constant fear of snakes and leeches. Last monsoon we had so much trouble. Leeches sucked on our children, leaving open wounds, but we feared snakes the most. Now, the monsoon season is approaching again and we are full of dread.”

Perceptions of increasing alcohol consumption were found in many wards visited.

The statements from many research sites that suggest that the challenges and uncertainties of post-earthquake life have turned many people to alcohol is an emerging cause for concern. Respondents in Sindhupalchowk, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, Solukhumbu, and Syangja districts all reported perceptions that over the course of the monsoon and winter seasons, alcohol consumption amongst men and women had increased, in part as a coping mechanism for trauma and poor living conditions. In Syaule VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, for example, one resident reported that due to the extreme cold in the winter, “old men and women drink hot water and alcohol from early in the morning.” Likewise in Doramba VDC in Ramechhap district, alcohol consumption reportedly increased amongst men as a method to deal with the winter cold. Security officials also frequently cited alcoholism as a cause of violence and crimes, especially domestic violence. A security official in Sindhupalchowk noted that earthquake-affected persons often spent their winter relief grants on alcohol, saying “[the government] gave them [money] to create warmth outside, but the people made warmth inside.” While these

perceived trends are difficult to corroborate, they present potential emerging challenges that will need to be tracked carefully.

Psychosocial impacts of the earthquakes were apparent to researchers in almost all of the VDCs visited.

With the exception of communities in Syangja district, which was the least affected district included in the research, psychological trauma was apparent amongst communities in every VDC. A teacher from Katunje in Okhaldhunga told us that the elderly and children still cry out “earthquake” during strong winds and storms. Despite this observation, sustained psychosocial counseling programs were not reported to be operating in any of the VDCs visited for the research.

Research teams attempted to collect information from security officials in each district regarding suicide incidences before and after the earthquakes, and

for the pre- and post-monsoon periods. However, it was not possible to obtain comparable figures in all locations. Nonetheless, suicide cases were mentioned by security officials to have either slightly increased or to have remained the same in three of the severely hit districts visited: Sindhupalchowk, Gorkha, and Ramechhap. For example, the data collected in Ramechhap reported a marginal increase in suicides for the nine and half months after the earthquakes compared to the same period before. Whereas 20 cases of suicide were reported for the period before the earthquakes, 26 cases have been reported for the same time period after the earthquakes. In general, security officials were unable to comment on the relationship between suicide cases and the earthquakes in Ramechhap. However, a security official in Sindhupalchowk related increases in suicides and alcoholism with the earthquakes.

Case Study 6.1: One family’s experience of the psychological impacts of the earthquakes

A 37-year-old primary school teacher at Baleshwar secondary school had moved to Kerung-6 in Solukhumbu district with her husband to teach. They are originally from Okhaldhunga. Both her house in Okhaldhunga and the flat she rents in Kerung were partially damaged during the earthquakes. She told researchers that, “it gets scary when there are aftershocks, but I think now we are adjusted.”

She remembers the chaos that erupted during the earthquake on 12 May 2015. She was teaching at the secondary school when the ground shook and her students began screaming and running in all directions. She panicked herself at first but managed to take all the students safely out of the class. Walls fell down in classrooms, but no one was hurt. She remembers, however, that it became very difficult after that day to bring students back to school. Children at the primary school are even more scared, she says. Only last month, when a bundle of metal sheets fell from the first floor, producing a loud sound, the children thought it was an earthquake and started running around blind with panic.

This teacher is also worried that her 15-year-old son has been psychologically traumatized

by the earthquakes. Since the earthquakes hit his boarding school in nearby Salleri, he has often fallen ill and suffered from anxiety attacks. He was too afraid to enter the flat in the damaged house where his family lived, so his parents arranged accommodation for him at a neighbor’s house which had not been damaged. He was taken to visit a psychiatrist at Salleri. But when there were no significant improvements after the session, her husband brought her son to Kathmandu for two counseling sessions. Now, after almost a year, there are signs that her son is recovering. He has started living with the family again, but his parents remain concerned that because of the disruption to his academic year, he may fall behind in his studies.

REED Nepal, a NGO, provided a one-day training on psychosocial counseling to all teachers in the school where this resident teaches. According to her, counseling the students was very helpful and, in her case, even for her son. In the training they were taught about how to divert one’s attention from the disaster through talking and the use of popular media. Although she is grateful for the training, she says it could have been longer and more detailed as there are so many people who are deeply traumatized.

6.2. Challenges facing specific vulnerable groups

The post-earthquake recovery process has been experienced differently by residents with specific vulnerabilities including women, the elderly, children, displaced persons, and economically disadvantaged persons.

Vulnerability can be defined as a susceptibility to physical or emotional harm. Exposure to potential disease, violence, and psychological distress were vulnerabilities common to all who lost homes and lived in temporary shelters. Throughout the wards visited, communities identified women, children, the elderly (especially single elderly persons), the economically

disadvantaged, and the displaced as particularly vulnerable populations.

Ward residents identified women as vulnerable in 25 out of 36 wards included in the research (18 accessible wards, 7 remote wards); children were identified as vulnerable by ward residents in 25 out of 36 wards (18 accessible wards, 7 remote wards); the elderly were identified in 30 out of 36 wards (22 accessible wards, 8 remote wards). Displaced persons and those living in temporary shelters were identified as vulnerable in 19 of the 36 wards included in the research (11 accessible wards, 8 remote wards). The unique challenges facing each of these groups are discussed below.

Figure 6.1: Groups identified as vulnerable populations by ward respondents

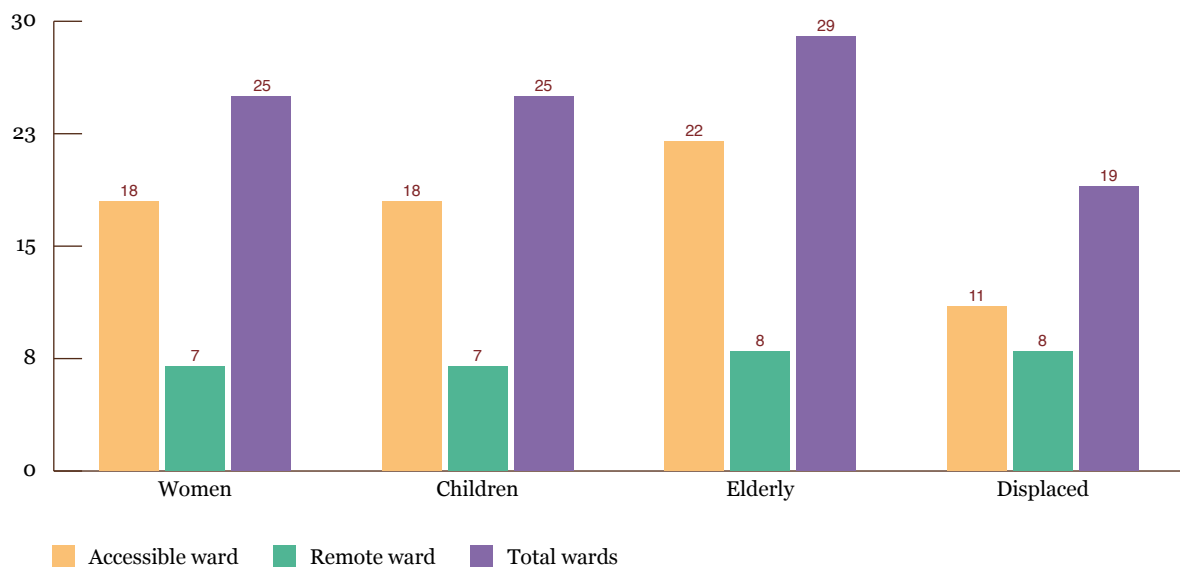


Figure 6.1 shows the number of wards (out of 36 total) that identified each of the groups listed in the figure as ‘vulnerable populations.’ Overall, 11 wards in the study were considered ‘remote’ and 25 ‘accessible.’

Women

Women faced issues relating to insecurity and discomfort in temporary shelters, exposure to danger as part of household duties, and increased burdens taking care of children and the elderly in challenging conditions.

Earthquake-affected women faced a variety of challenges throughout the monsoon and winter seasons.

How they experienced their exposure to harm also depended on other elements of their identities – as women of particular castes and ethnicities, ages, and places. Many women, but especially single women, expressed uneasiness sharing space at close quarters with men in communal and shared temporary shelters. Issues such as a lack of toilets in Barpak VDC in Gorkha district, and crowded conditions in monsoon



Photo: Amanda Gurung

community shelters in Nele VDC in Solukhumbu district, made it challenging for pre-menopausal women to take care of hygiene during menstruation, causing discomfort and feelings of embarrassment and shame. Women of all ages also reported fears of staying in shelters without strong doors or walls, explaining that they could be entered easily. Single women staying alone in temporary shelters felt exposed to the risk of sexual violence and robbery.

It is hard to analyze whether rates of sexual and gender-based violence have increased since the earthquakes. Although only a few instances of sexual violence in temporary shelters were reported, under-reporting of sexual violence is a global phenomenon. What is clear is that most women interviewed for the research who were residing in temporary shelters expressed fear of sexual violence such as rape and molestation. It is also possible that the fear of sexual and gender-based violence stems from the already quite high rate of domestic violence in communities across Nepal rather than being linked to the earthquakes. Respondents in all the research VDCs acknowledged

that domestic violence does occur. Statistics from Gorkha district show that the number of reported rape cases has increased since the earthquakes, although it is unclear whether this shows an increase in actual incidents of rape, or just an increase in the reporting of them. In general, instances of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, are not frequently reported to the police, which further complicates research efforts to discover a trend in these types of crimes.

A variety of other challenges for women were reported including issues of exposure to danger and challenges of health. Women reported being susceptible to harm due to their societal responsibilities as homemakers. When carrying out household tasks, they were often exposed to unsafe conditions, such as venturing inside damaged homes to use stoves or access supplies. Compared to men, the responsibility of caring for children, newborns, and the elderly also placed increased physical and psychological strain on women. Pregnant women and young mothers had particular challenges to face in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

In several VDCs, young mothers and pregnant women became sick during the winter months. In Syaule VDC in Sindhupalchowk, a ward level health worker reported that there had been a case of a young mother who gave birth to twins over the winter but lost both children due to winter exposure in a temporary shelter.

In another case, in Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga, the chief of the health post noted that he had, “referred three pregnant women for abortions due to their extreme anxiety. We had no such cases in the VDC before the quake.”

Case Study 6.2: Health in temporary shelters

A widow in Baruneshwor Ward 1 has lived alone since her husband died 13 years ago. While other families in the village started making makeshift bamboo sheds after the quake damaged their houses, she had more difficulty securing shelter. Eventually, she borrowed money to add to the NPR 15,000 given by the government to make a habitable cottage for herself made of bamboo, tarp, and CGI sheets. During the eight months that she has lived in the cottage, she has been frequently falling ill, and due to frequent visits to the hospital in the District Headquarters, she has not been able to work regularly. She is both losing out on daily wages and also spending an unexpected amount of money at the hospital. Due to her health needs, she spent the winterization cash given by the government—NPR 10,000—on medical treatment. “I suffer from asthma which has worsened after I started living in this cold hut.”

Among Katunje’s quake victims who have been continuously living in makeshift shelters over the monsoon and winter seasons, mostly children and the elderly have been falling ill. One grandmother told researchers that, “My 22-month old granddaughter has been ill constantly since we started living in the makeshift cottage. Even my adult daughter caught a skin-allergy after we shifted to the hut. Others have fevers.” A 55-year-old man from the same VDC recounted the troubles he has suffered since his wife fell ill in their temporary hut. He decided to take his wife to Biratnagar where, he believes, the health facilities are better and the hospital is better equipped. He said, “The doctor asked us to avoid cold, smoke, and dust. How is that possible in the hut? The floor is of mud, the wall and the ceiling are made of CGI. How can it be warm? We use firewood for cooking which means we cannot avoid smoke.”

The senior health assistant of Rampur health post, told researchers that the number of

patients has more than doubled in the months following the quake. “We had patients with mostly skin diseases and they also had psychological problems like fear and anxiety. After January, we treated many patients with pneumonia, cough, fever, and problems related to breathing.” He also mentioned malnutrition cases as increasing. “I have treated 19 children with malnutrition after the quake. Since parents might be unable to work regularly, their regular income has been disrupted. This might have resulted in the lack of nutritious food at home.” This health worker expressed further fears that health risks may escalate once summer begins as unclean sheds and the huts become breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which transmit many diseases.

The same kinds of health issues were found in Katunje VDC. Individuals there have been suffering from pneumonia, coughs, and colds. A mother in Katunje Ward 1 complained about her infant daughter’s frequent fevers. The adults in the family have also been falling sick repeatedly. She said, “if we had a proper house, we would not be wasting so much of money on medicines.”

The chief of Katunje health post pointed to the lack of proper living spaces as the cause for the increase of health-related issues among the people in the VDC. “Many children suffer pneumonia because they do not have enough warm clothes, proper food, and warm places to sleep. Children from more than 50% of Dalit families of Wards 1 and 8 have fallen ill.” He also pointed out that issues of malnutrition in Dalit children were not common before the quake, but now, “Two children in Ward 8, one in Ward 2, and one in Ward 5 have been badly affected by severe malnutrition. Before the quake, there were only four cases of malnutrition in the entire VDC and now we have traced 17 cases of malnutrition. The majority of these children are from the Dalit families.”



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Children

Children were among those most affected by illness from living in temporary shelters.

Across the research areas, citizens reported that children became frequently ill in the “congested and cold”⁴² temporary shelters. In the highly affected VDCs visited, children were regarded as generally susceptible to illness throughout the monsoon and winter seasons. In Katunje VDC, Okhaldhunga district, cases of pneumonia, fever, and swellings were reported among children. Adults tried to combat illness in children by attempting to fortify shelters from rain, cold, and insects, but beyond this there was no evidence of other safeguarding strategies being used. Children may also

be at increased risk of exposure-related illness due to necessary movement between temporary shelters and temporary learning centers and/or partially damaged school buildings.⁴³

In addition, there were visible signs of emotional trauma in children in several wards visited. For example, in Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, children became instantly scared by various noises, thinking that they signaled another earthquake. Although in several VDCs school teachers have been teaching about earthquakes in class as a way to calm children’s fears, there had reportedly been no general counseling provided to children in any areas researched.

⁴² Which is how a mother in Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga district described the temporary shelters.

⁴³ One hundred school buildings were reported to have been fully or partially damaged during the earthquakes: 58 in accessible VDCs;

and 42 in remote VDCs. Only two schools in the areas visited were stated to have had no infrastructural damage, yet only 11 schools (all in accessible VDCs) had been rebuilt.

The elderly

Elderly residents were also seen as among the most vulnerable to illness.

Many elderly residents reported suffering from ailments such as asthma, rheumatism, pneumonia, colds, coughs, and body swelling throughout the winter months. In some areas, the arrival of winter relief may well have decreased and prevented illness. More severe cases of illness were reported in VDCs that experienced irregularities in the distribution or use of winter relief. Winter relief, for example, arrived after the cold season ended in Okhaldhunga. In Syaule VDC, Sindhupalchowk district, one INGO's decision to conduct a "geological assessment" to determine, by altitude, which areas of the VDC would be coldest,

and hence most in need of winter relief kits, resulted in several wards not being provided clothes, blankets, and tarps whereas nearby locations had received such support. An elderly woman in one of those wards said, "I nearly died due to the cold [in the winter]! How can they consider this place warm?"

Respondents also highlighted exposure during the monsoon season as a serious problem for the elderly. In Waling VDC in Syangja district, for example, one woman we spoke to had decided to push forward with reconstructing her house, despite uncertainty in reconstruction policy, motivated by the fear that her elderly disabled mother-in-law would not survive another monsoon season in a temporary shelter.

Economically disadvantaged persons

Disproportionate effects on the poor were observed in many areas.

Poorer families were more likely to live in houses that were damaged by the earthquakes in many locations where earthquake impact was uneven and left stronger houses standing. In higher impact areas the earthquakes were more indiscriminate. Yet even there households with lower levels of income were less well prepared to overcome the challenges created by the earthquakes and to meet the needs of the recovery process. It bears repeating that the

vulnerabilities of women, children, and the elderly are worsened by poverty, and particularly in the context of displacement. In one example, a woman in Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga district was forced to move into the ground floor of her partially collapsed house since her children were continuously falling sick in the temporary shelter, and she could not afford the materials to make improvements to either the shelter or her house. In Case Study 6.2, above, a link between impoverished children and rising malnutrition also shows how poverty can accentuate challenges of recovery.

In all of the VDCs visited, those who could afford to rebuild homes or to fortify temporary shelters had begun to do so, while those who could not look set to have to endure another monsoon in temporary shelters.



Photo: Binu Sharma

Case Study 6.3: Poverty and perceived unfairness

A woman who moved to Dhuwakot-1, Gorkha, from Nawalparasi district seven years ago married a man from a family of ten brothers, meaning that they had no hope of gaining any family inheritance. They decided to leave their home to build their wealth in another location, with the hope of someday returning home. In reality, they have not been able to improve their economic situation. Health challenges, and only owning a small plot of land to grow maize and keep a few goats and a cow, have meant that they have not been able to save.

They live in a house of bamboo and straw, floored with mud and stone. The earthquakes did not damage this structure. If they had had the financial capacity to build a mud and stone house, they would have, but they were unable to. As they live in an undamaged house,

regardless of the construction materials, they have not had access to the government relief provided to those with damaged houses. The fact that she was too poor to build a mud house meant that she could not receive relief. While most of the community received NPR 10,000 to buy winter clothes, and most of them have moved back into their cracked houses, she received nothing. Instead, in the past she had to put her land as collateral to get a loan from the Agriculture Development Bank, which she used to buy winter clothes by herself.

Seeing neighbors who have several houses, one of which collapsed four years prior to the earthquakes, receive government aid is frustrating to this woman who has received nothing. Her only choice is to remain in her uncracked bamboo shack.

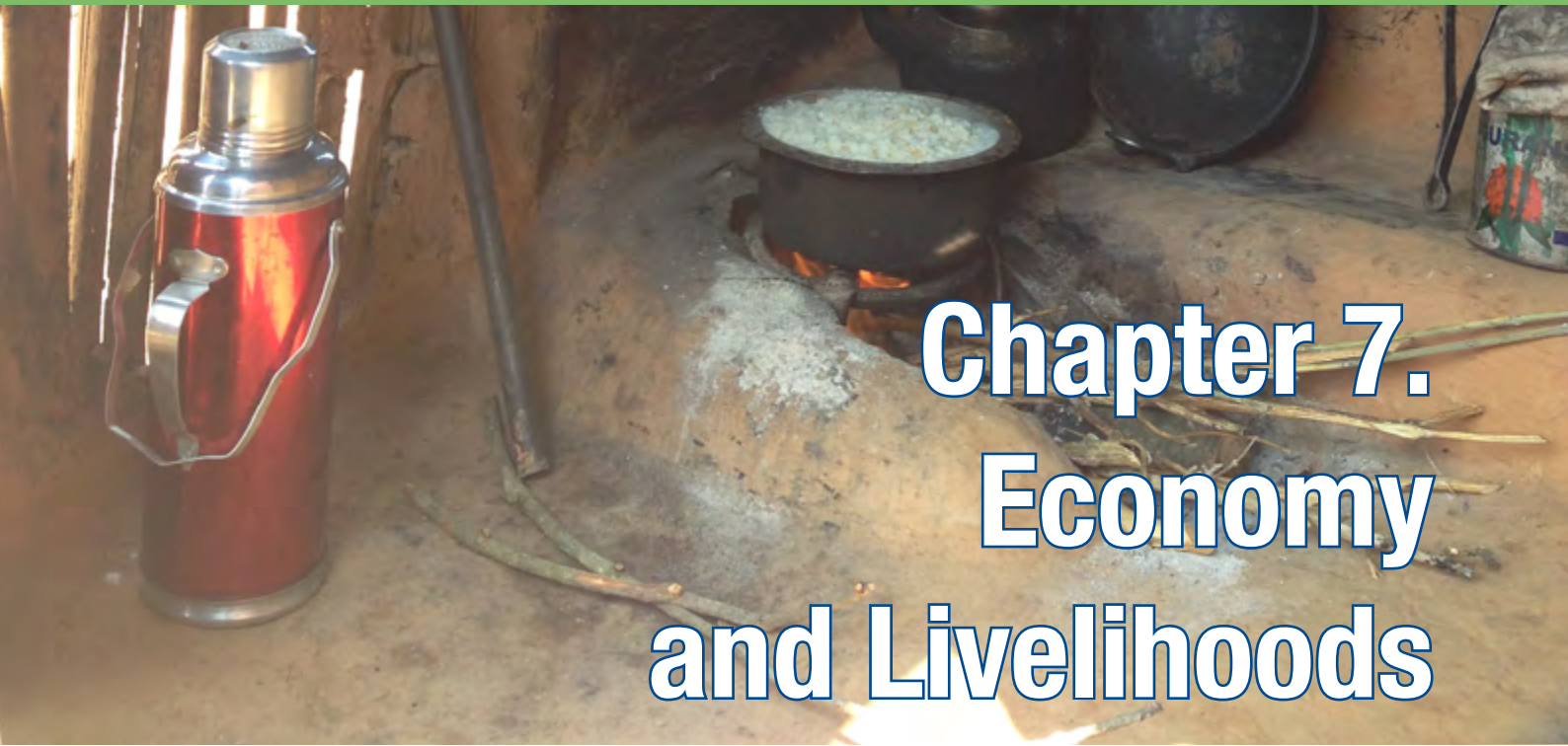
Displaced persons

Researchers observed a correlation between displacement and vulnerability in the field locations visited; this vulnerability persists without clear plans for resettlement.

Displacement increases the exposure of individuals to a range of physical and psychological harms, which are often interconnected. As described in Chapter 5, displacement onto public property brings people into potential conflict with neighbors. For those who have remained close enough to their original lands to continue farming, the daily need to return to earthquake-damaged fields to practice agriculture or to graze animals increases both the physical risk and psychological stress. Fear of landslides being triggered by aftershocks has created a sense of insecurity

amongst people in highly affected wards across the districts visited for the research. As people prepare for a second monsoon season in temporary shelters, they continue to strongly demand that the government conduct geological assessments of the land from which they were displaced.

As discussed above, people connect the frequency of illness they have experienced with living in temporary shelters; as a result, some have chosen to move back into their damaged homes. However, it was widely acknowledged that this is not a lasting solution. Individuals sleeping in the remains of their homes state that they are fearful that the house will collapse if another earthquake hits, and report trouble sleeping through the night.



Chapter 7. Economy and Livelihoods

Photo: Binu Sharma

- ▶ Most earthquake victims were able to resume their livelihoods after the monsoon season including farmers, business owners, and manual laborers.
- ▶ Despite this general pattern, there are many households whose incomes remain affected by the earthquakes. This includes farmers, limited by displacement and drying up of water sources, and businesses that suffered significant damage to structures or equipment.
- ▶ The tourism business was hard hit in many districts and is yet to resume fully.
- ▶ The fuel crisis raised the costs of basic goods and the price of construction materials, but markets have since returned to normal functioning.
- ▶ The rate and volume of monetary borrowing has increased since the monsoon.
- ▶ Many households are considering taking on debt for rebuilding houses, but have not yet done so as they are waiting for the government assistance.
- ▶ Migration remains a common phenomenon in the districts visited, but with no discernable change in number or pattern since the earthquakes.

Box 7.1: IRM-1 findings (June 2015) on economy and livelihoods

The impact of the earthquakes varied by source of livelihood and depended largely on the level of damage. Proportionally, the most significant impact was on farmers in highly affected wards due to fear of recurring aftershocks and risk of landslides. Many small business owners faced a complete loss of livelihood as their stocks had been destroyed and no compensation was

provided. The tourism industry was severely affected in Dolakha and Gorkha. The sale of assets remained low and was limited to the selling of livestock. Borrowing large amounts of money was uncommon, but most people planned to borrow in future for reconstruction. The volume of remittances was reported to have increased after the earthquakes.

7.1. Impacts on sources of livelihood post-monsoon

The resumption of livelihoods and recovery of the economy has been quicker in the low impact districts compared with those that were highly affected.

For example, Syangja, the least affected among the six districts visited, has seen the fastest recovery of livelihoods and the economy.

Most of the earthquake-affected population relied on farming as their primary source of income, and farming was badly hit; however, businesses that suffered serious damage have had a more difficult recovery process.

In terms of the number of households affected, farming experienced the most widespread impacts. However, most farmers are recovering and have restarted their agricultural activities since the monsoon, in many cases even before. This is true even for the most severely affected areas of Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk. In contrast, while fewer people worked in business in highly affected areas, many of those who did suffered substantial economic losses. For those in business, and related skilled labor, the speed of recovery has been dependent on the specific damage suffered, but the field work showed signs of general recovery. The clear exception to this has been the tourism industry. At the time of the research, tourism, particularly in Solukhumbu and Gorkha districts, was still struggling to recover from the losses incurred by the earthquakes.

Although farming was the most common source of livelihood in 34 out of the 36 wards visited, a majority of the households was engaged in multiple occupations.

Often a few members of a household would be primarily involved in agriculture while others would work as wage laborers. Similarly, some households generate income through both farming and by running a small business, such as a shop or restaurant. In urban areas, family members may run businesses, or work in government jobs, or in the non-governmental sector. Going abroad or to urban centers within the country for employment was a very common pattern in the districts studied and this had largely remained unaffected by the earthquakes. These combined income strategies increased household resilience and allowed some earthquake victims to better cope with the consequences of the disaster.

Research did not find significant numbers of people changing their primary source of income because of the impact of the earthquakes.

Researchers found that only in two wards of Bamtibhandar VDC in Ramechhap district had farmers changed their primary occupation, mainly shifting to working as laborers. For those in the tourism industry, impacts have lasted longer, and some have had to take temporary work. However, those interviewed generally reported that they will return to their primary occupations if tourist entries increase again in 2016, allowing those working as porters, guides, and guest house owners to regain their primary sources of income

Figure 7.1: Perceived level of impact on common sources of income

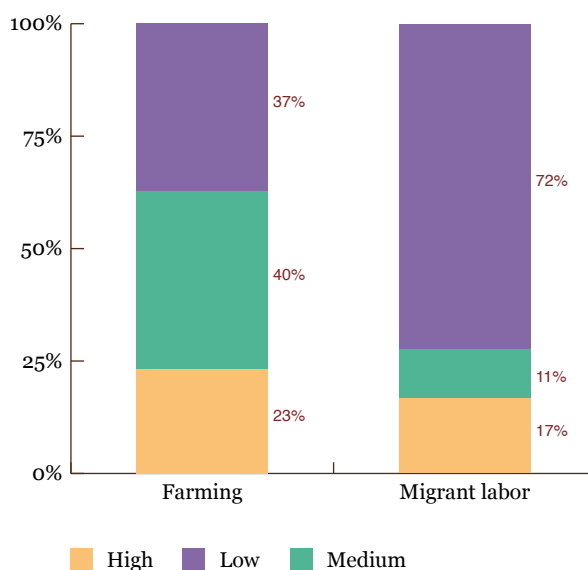


Figure 7.1 shows the percentage of the 36 wards covered in which researchers rated the level of impact on two key sources of income as high, medium or low based on information collected locally.



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Farming

In all wards visited, farmers gradually resumed farming after the monsoon, although farmers that remain displaced struggled to cultivate their fields.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, farming was affected because entire communities shifted their focus to the construction of temporary shelters. Other challenges included the fear of aftershocks and landslides, displacement from their original settlements, and the inability to plant crops due to a lack of seeds or disruption of water sources, which affected irrigation in many highly impacted wards. In Syaule and Baruwa VDCs in Sindhupalchowk district, many farmers could not plant their fields on time as their seeds had either been buried or had perished. The loss of draft animals, particularly in Sindhupalchowk district, also affected productivity, especially when it was time for farmers to plough their fields. This resulted in some farmers leaving a portion of their lands uncultivated. Displaced farmers were sometimes forced to sell their draft animals immediately after the earthquakes at lower than market prices as they could not manage to keep and feed them. They later had to purchase other draft animals to restart cultivation, but generally paid a higher price as the livestock market returned to normal prices.

As time has passed since the earthquakes, field research shows that for most, farming has gradually

returned to normal practices. Increasing numbers of farmers started working their fields again after monsoon season had ended, partly because the fear of aftershocks and earthquakes gradually subsided, and the risk of rain-triggered landslides also decreased, but also because farmers could not afford to abandon farming for too long. Since most households are subsistence farmers, they have also been able to restart work as daily laborers in each other's fields.

However, in Sindhupalchowk, Ramechhap, and Okhaldhunga districts, a number of displaced households who are dependent on agriculture have had additional challenges cultivating their fields, as most of their time is spent walking between their temporary homes and their farmlands. Nonetheless, throughout the monsoon, many of the displaced farmers returned to work in their fields and pastures despite the risk of landslides and challenges generated by the location of their temporary shelters.

The earthquakes exacerbated the hardships faced by many farmers before the disaster.

Certain challenges faced by farmers in many locations existed before the earthquakes, but they have become more pronounced since the disaster; in some places, these preexisting problems have made recovery harder. Already poor irrigation facilities in the districts visited, particularly in Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga,

have exacerbated the challenges farmers have faced after the earthquakes. In Baruneshwor VDC in Okhaldhunga, and Ramechhap municipality of Ramechhap, the earthquakes reportedly caused some water sources to dry up, affecting farming in those places and resulting in lower yields than usual. In Baruneshwor VDC in Okhaldhunga district, farmers were unable to plant crops on time due to the lack of water, as the Pongting Irrigation Canal was damaged. Although, the research effort could not confirm the direct causation between the drying up of water resources and the earthquakes, respondents in the wards

visited felt that the disaster accelerated the drying up of water sources that may have already begun.

Similarly, poor access to agriculture technology, seeds, and fertilizers, and poor transport infrastructure, all of which characterize the challenges of rural farming in Nepal, were exacerbated by the earthquakes. People in earthquake-affected districts struggled to access seeds and fertilizers and also to transport their produce to bigger markets. In addition, the fuel crisis that resulted from the blockade made it very difficult for farmers to transport their produce to markets.

Case Study 7.1: Water crisis in Okhaldhunga

Since the earthquakes, a 36-year-old resident of VDC 2 no longer has adequate access to safe drinking water. Before the quakes, there was enough water in the 22 public water taps in her ward. However, the sources from where the drinking water had been brought have been slowly drying up due to landslides that have affected the pipes and which have disrupted the flow of water. A long queue for water now forms most mornings and evenings. The resident reported that “people have started fighting over water at the public taps.” Adding to local frustration is the fact that until last year, each household in the ward paid NPR 500 annually for the maintenance of the water pipes. This year, each household has had to pay twice as much.

Similar water-related issues have also affected Prapcha VDC. Since the quake, the flow of water at the public taps has decreased. A local teacher

from Deurali Danda told the research team that “we have to wake up in the middle of the night to collect water from the public taps.” Two of the four sources used by households in wards 1, 2, and 3 for water have almost entirely dried up.

The Molung River Irrigation Project, the biggest irrigation project in the VDC, was also damaged by the quake. As the water levels in the canal have decreased, agricultural production has suffered. A CPN-UML representative in Prapcha VDC, said that “land which usually produced one metric ton of rice has produced less than 700 kilograms of rice this year.” Another farmer from Ward 3 lamented that “Before the quake, the yield from my field was two *paathis*. But, this year, due to the lack of irrigation, the yield is less than one *paathi*.”

Labor

All kinds of wage labor activities resumed after the monsoon.

Wage labor is one of the major sources of livelihood across the affected districts and was used by households to supplement agricultural activities in all of the wards visited. As with other occupations, wage labor was also affected in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, but the impact was mixed. Skilled laborers such as tailors, blacksmiths, and factory workers suffered economic loss due to disruption of their routines. Laborers engaged in construction and unskilled manual labor had opportunities after the earthquakes to help clear away damaged structures,

build temporary shelters, and work on some of the limited reconstruction activities that had started. Agriculture-related day labor was affected in the months after the earthquakes, but this is slowly normalizing now. This trend of a return to livelihood activities was observed in all labor sectors, except work related to trekking.

There has been increased demand for laborers involved in construction in many locations, often with increases in wages.

After the monsoon, demand for labor has increased as the reconstruction of homes and public buildings

slowly starts. This rise in demand is leading to increased wages, in some locations even leading to a doubling of wages. In Bamtibhandar VDC in Ramechhap district, wages jumped from NPR 600 to NPR 1,200 per day for skilled laborers such as masons and carpenters, and from NPR 450 to NPR 900 for unskilled laborers. Similarly, in Barpak VDC in Gorkha district, and Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga

district, daily wages rose from NPR 600 to NPR 1,000 for skilled laborers. The increase in wages for construction jobs led to some farmers choosing to engage in more daily wage labor to supplement their regular occupation of farming. Demand for labor is expected to rise further with the anticipated increase in the rate of reconstruction work.

Case Study 7.2: Trekking loses, masonry gains

At least one person in each household in Kerung VDC is either a mason or a carpenter. Another very important source of livelihood in the VDC is trekking and tourism. So on average one person from each household in the VDC also spends between two and three months each year working as a trekking guide or a porter. According to a low level porter, an individual can earn approximately NPR 70,000 per season. The total amount for the entire VDC is a significant sum. During the off-season, these people work in secondary occupations such as farming and small businesses.

After the earthquakes, with the increase in demand for reconstruction of both semi-permanent shelters and permanent houses, there has been an increase in the prices of both timber

and the wage of the masons. A mason from Kerung 1, who is also the WCF coordinator, said that there has been at least a 40% increase in the price of timber since the monsoon, and a 30-60% increase in the daily wages of masons. Some masons from Kerung are even now traveling outside of the district to build houses in areas where wages are much higher.

Although trekking has taken a major hit due to the earthquakes, it is hoped that the sector will bounce back up to near normal levels in the high tourist season in the Fall of 2016. If this return comes, the economy of the VDC should see a major boost. The availability of a high number of masons in this locale has the potential to be a great local asset as reconstruction efforts start in earnest.

Business

Most types of business activities have fully resumed, but with individual exceptions in the highly affected wards in Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk districts.

Most of the wards visited only had very limited business activity to start with, consisting of tiny grocery shops, teashops, and eateries. Only a few wards studied had a more developed market with shops, small restaurants, and guesthouses. The earthquakes had varying impacts on the businesses in different wards. The research data shows that 15 wards visited for the research reported some form of impact on businesses due to the earthquakes. The nature of impact on businesses was mainly related to damages to business-related infrastructure. As such, with few exceptions such as few hotels and stores in Barpak VDC in Gorkha, which have not been able to reopen, businesses are recovering. Some businesses in those wards also benefited from the increased flow of people during the early relief distribution phase.

Research showed that some businesses in Lisankhu VDC and Barpak VDC (stores, small restaurants, tea houses, and guest houses) benefited from the large number of people coming to those VDCs immediately after the earthquakes. However, in other wards where businesses were impacted by the earthquakes, the recovery was halted by the blockade and the ensuing inadequate transportation facilities and increase in the price of goods.

In the highly-hit wards in Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk districts, many shops and hotels sustained major damage and took some time to revive. Most of the businesses operated out of the houses of the owners. Building temporary shelters, and in some cases also reconstructing buildings, helped businesses restart. Those who suffered direct loss of their business owing to the destruction of their productive assets are mostly now restarting their businesses by borrowing money or repairing machinery and instruments. Representative examples can be found in Lisankhu and Baruwa VDCs

in Sindhupalchowk district where carpet weavers who lost their looms in the earthquakes have restarted their weaving with new or repaired looms.

Some individuals have taken advantage of opportunities linked to needs during the recovery and reconstruction process. For example, several new stores and small hotels had been opened in the bazaar of Barpak town in Gorkha district, some with the intention of

providing services to outsiders working on relief efforts. Similarly, more shops had been added in Baruwa town in Sindhupalchowk district. In Ward 3 of Shree Krishna Gandaki VDC in Syangja district, a group of young entrepreneurs have started a concrete block factory to manufacture supposedly earthquake-resistant building materials. These entrepreneurs acknowledged that the earthquakes and expected reconstruction needs led them to initiate this venture.

Case Study 7.3: Young entrepreneurs in Syangja start a concrete block factory

The recent round of research in Syangja found a group of young entrepreneurs who had started a factory to manufacture earthquake-proof concrete blocks in recent months. This group was looking into earthquake resistant building materials on the internet when they came across a model for concrete blocks that required relatively little capital. By their own admission, it was the earthquakes that encouraged them to pursue this technology.

One of the leaders of this group was unemployed before the earthquakes, and had been looking to start a business but had not yet found the right idea. When the earthquakes damaged and destroyed many houses in their village, including their own, they began thinking about ways to rebuild in a safer way as houses made of mud, bricks, and stones were deemed unsafe. Internet research led to the idea for

concrete blocks, and coincidentally one of the entrepreneurs had a relative who ran a concrete block factory in Butwal who could provide guidance on how to start manufacturing. This helped the young men recognize that their new venture would not require a large up-front investment. The group registered a company in June 2015 and have invested NPR 800,000 to date, including the purchase of a machine from Thailand for NPR 300,000. They took training on manufacturing concrete blocks and started producing and selling blocks in September 2015. The group has been encouraged by the demand for the blocks, with new orders coming from surrounding villages. They expect increased demand as reconstruction efforts intensify.

Markets have been functioning normally since the monsoon, except during the blockade, which resulted in raised costs of basic goods and construction materials.

By the end of the monsoon, the markets for goods in all the VDCs visited had started to function normally. There were not consistent reports about significant pricing changes or goods that became unavailable immediately after the monsoon. There was apparently an increase in the rate and volume of purchasing of building materials to supplement the relief assistance across the wards visited, both for temporary shelters and for housing (re)construction. In highly affected wards in Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk, there were also anecdotes of a decline in the purchase of food items immediately after the earthquakes, likely due to the concentration of food aid in these areas. This trend did

not, however, continue for long as the supply of food relief stopped after the initial few weeks.

After the monsoon, the market was visibly affected by the fuel crisis caused by the border blockade. The blockade created scarcity and inflation in the markets. It raised the costs of essential goods and construction materials, not only increasing the cost of living but also disrupting many individuals' plans to rebuild their homes or improve their temporary shelters. The effect of the fuel crisis was more severe in highly-affected districts than in districts with lower levels of impact from the earthquakes. For example, people in Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk districts complained widely that the fuel crisis added more problems to their already difficult lives, as the prices of goods soared overnight. After the end of the blockade, it took more than a month for things to normalize.



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Tourism

The tourism industry was hit hard in Solukhumbu and Gorkha districts and had yet to resume fully. But it was widely believed that the situation would improve in the coming season.

After the earthquakes, the flow of tourists declined drastically across the country. Even after the monsoon, normally the peak season for tourism, businesses did not see significant improvements. The number of tourists coming into Nepal dropped by 26.5% year-on-year during the four-month period from September to December 2015.⁴⁴ The districts of Solukhumbu, Gorkha, and Ramechhap were the most affected among the districts visited for the study. The recovery of the tourism industry in those districts has been limited. Tourism businesses in four wards (Bamtibhandar VDC Ward 3 in Ramechhap district, Doramba VDC Ward 3 in Ramechhap district, Dudhkunda VDC Ward 5 in Solukhumbu district, and Barpak VDC Ward 5 in Gorkha district) continue to

struggle to attract customers, even as operators made efforts to reconstruct business-related infrastructure. The recovery of tourism businesses in wards where people have not been able to reconstruct, or where people did not have alternative sources of livelihood, has inevitably been arduous.

Trekking, which forms a crucial part of the tourism industry in Nepal, failed to recover after the monsoon even during the peak trekking season in the Fall. Routes and trekking trails that were damaged by the earthquakes, such as stretches of the Manaslu trek in Gorkha district, had not been rebuilt in time for the trekking season in October. Combined with the overall decline in tourists, this had a large impact on incomes in these areas. Tour guides and porters in trekking areas tend to work between three to four months of the year, normally between September and December. They spend the rest of the year working on their farmlands or as wage laborers. During this past trekking season, most trekking sector workers worked instead as construction laborers to cope with the financial losses resulting from the downturn in trekking.

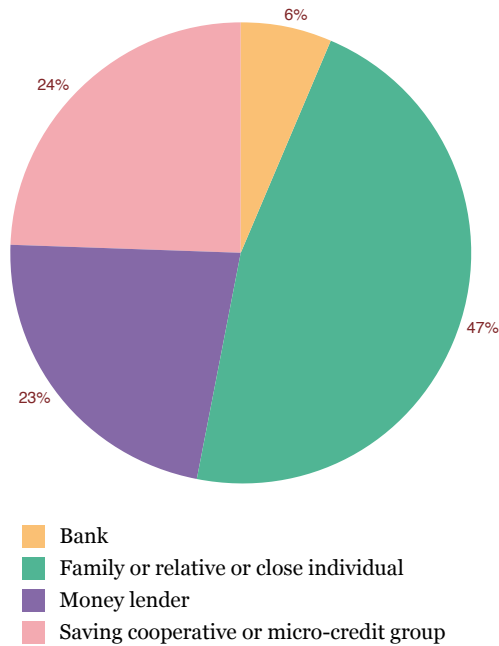
The people interviewed for the research hoped that the situation would improve in the coming season between September and December 2016.

⁴⁴ The Kathmandu Post, Arrivals hit 6-year low as quake, agitation take toll January 22, 2016, available at: <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-01-22/arrivals-hit-6-year-low-as-quake-agitation-take-toll.html>.

7.2. Strategies for coping with financial stress

Borrowing and lending

Figure 7.2: Sources of money lending used by households reporting borrowing



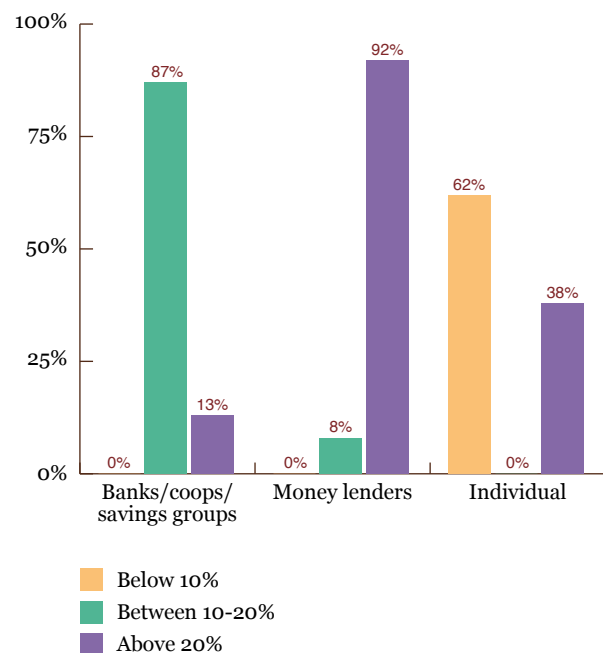
mainly borrowed to cope with the difficulties they faced meeting their daily livelihood needs. Apart from a few individual cases of borrowing for the purpose of reconstruction in Tanglichok VDC, Barpak VDC, and Dhuwakot VDC in Gorkha district, as well as Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga district, people in general did not report borrowing for reconstruction. Around 90% of people who reported borrowing after the earthquakes, across the districts visited, stated that they were forced by circumstance to borrow money, although it again should be noted that debt was common in many areas before the earthquakes as well.

The rate of monetary borrowing had increased since the monsoon. The volume of debt may increase if government assistance for reconstruction proves inadequate.

Borrowing had already been a common trend before the earthquakes in the wards visited and many households had existing debts. This is because subsistence farming was the primary source of livelihood for the majority of households in the earthquake affected areas. Since supplementary secondary sources of income contributed insufficiently towards meeting basic needs, people had to resort to borrowing if they needed large amounts of money. People would borrow for several reasons, from constructing houses to buying food. In districts such as Sindhupalchowk and Gorkha, where the migration rate was higher, people borrowed to send family members abroad. The rate of borrowing was relatively low in Solukhumbu district, where most people had multiple occupations that seemed to bring in enough income to meet their needs and expenses.

In 18 out of the 36 wards visited, community members reported an increase in the rate of borrowing since the earthquakes. Research data shows that people

Figure 7.3: Average interest rates charged by lenders



In each ward visited researchers established if there had been significant borrowing from financial institutions (banks and savings groups/coops), money lenders or family members/individuals. When there was significant borrowing in any ward, researchers would ask respondents to identify the average lending rates charged. Figure 7.3 shows the percentage of wards reporting interest rates of below 10%, between 10-20%, and above 20%.



Photo: Binu Sharma

Among those who reported that they had borrowed money, 47% of people borrowed from their immediate family and relatives, 24% borrowed from savings cooperatives, and 23% from local money lenders. The rate of borrowing from banking institutions was the lowest, at only 6%, since people do not have easy access to banks in the rural areas or do not qualify for bank loans in many cases. Instead, they had to resort to borrowing large amounts from local money lenders at interest rates as high as 40% per annum. When people borrowed from financial institutions, or friends or relatives, many only paid 5-10% in annual interest, but there was significant variation in rates reported. Interest rates varied significantly in different wards, even within the same district, and there were individuals and coops reportedly lending at high rates. Money lenders were reported to charge anywhere from 24-40% in interest, with 36% being the interest rate reported by the highest number of wards. Savings cooperatives or micro-credit groups lent at rates ranging from 1% to 24%, with both 10% and 18% being commonly reported interest rates. Households borrowing from family or individuals reported a range of interest rates from 1% up to 36%, but the most common interest rates reported in these situations were 4-5% per annum. Significant borrowing from

banks was only reported in several wards. In those locations, annual interest rates of 18-24% were reported, with 18% being most frequently cited.

Most people were yet to start rebuilding their houses at the time of this study. Many of those interviewed indicated that they may borrow more money when they begin reconstructing their homes.

Among the households interviewed, many shared that if government cash grants proved inadequate to pay for housing reconstruction, or were delayed for too long, they would have to consider taking on more debt. In either case, the rate of borrowing money may increase in the future. In Dhuwakot VDC in Gorkha district, a respondent who was waiting for the government support indicated that he would have to borrow money in the future as the expected cash grant of NPR 200,000 would not be enough to build a house. This concern was echoed in all the wards visited. The timing of government assistance is also important as delayed disbursement may result in some taking debt to finance reconstruction before the 2016 monsoon season. People desperately want to build their homes before the rains arrive.



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Many individuals expressed an interest in borrowing if the government introduces schemes to make credit conveniently available at minimal interest rates. There was demand across all districts visited for such schemes since people thought the government grants would not be sufficient for reconstruction. In fact, there is a soft loan scheme the government has worked to make available through commercial banks, but people across the wards visited did not appear to be aware of this program.⁴⁵ Business owners who had lost their businesses as a result of the earthquakes were also strongly demanding soft loan schemes from the government to help them restart their businesses. For example, in Ward 5 of Barpak VDC in Gorkha district, business owners reported that they were planning to

borrow up to NPR 1,500,000 to revive their businesses which had been disrupted by the earthquakes.

Across the districts visited, people worried about how to repay their increasing loans and debts. People are hoping that cash grants, expected to be provided by the government, will enable them to repay the debts. People have been taking substantial fiscal risks in anticipation of government grants. Those households with family members working abroad could rely on remittances to repay the debts, but this cash flow is not available to many. In a very few instances, people considered repaying the debts by selling assets, but this is not a common occurrence yet.

⁴⁵ Very quickly after the earthquakes, in May 2015, a loan scheme was set up by the Nepal Rastra Bank that included subsidised loans at 2% interest. These loans were to be disbursed by commercial banks and had a ceiling of NPR 2.5 million for the Kathmandu Valley and NPR 1.5 million for the rest of the country. Recent reports suggested that take up was very low (only six loans were given), the loans were not economically viable for commercial banks, and they were extremely difficult to apply for (possibly because of obstacles put in place by commercial

banks), not least because potential recipients lack collateral. Also, people waiting for reconstruction grants thought loans would make them ineligible for the grants. The lack of awareness of this scheme among citizens may have also played a role in low take up. More info is provided in these articles: <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2015-05-07/earthquake-victims-to-get-loans-at-2pc.html> ; <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-04-14/central-banks-loan-scheme-for-quake-survivors-falls-flat.html>

There was no definite trend to indicate which community within the locales visited was borrowing in greater volumes or at higher rates. Generally, people with lower levels of income were borrowing more often. They came from different social and ethnic groups, including Brahmin, Chhetri, Janajatis, and Dalits. In

all the wards visited, people from each of these groups had either borrowed or were planning to borrow. But, in nine wards, marginalized Dalits and Janajati groups seemed more inclined to borrow, likely due to local socio-economic differences.

Sale of assets

Asset sales after the monsoon remained minimal.

Sales have been very low, even compared to the low rates observed in the pre-monsoon period. Those sales that have occurred have almost always been limited to the sale of livestock. The research data shows that in only five of the wards studied, have people sold any assets to cope with the impacts of the earthquakes. Most earthquake survivors were waiting for government cash grants to come through. It can be anticipated that some may sell their assets in the future if the government fails to provide the grants or if the grants are insufficient, but there is no evidence of these kinds of actions yet.

The sale of livestock was relatively higher before the monsoon season, as most displaced families in high impact wards were forced to sell their livestock when they moved to temporary settlements. Many other survivors had to sell their livestock to meet immediate needs such as household expenses and to pay for building temporary shelters. After this initial spike, asset sales declined after the monsoon season ended. This decrease was largely attributed to the cash grants provided by the government, which helped people address their basic needs. Of those who sold their livestock, around 95% did so in order to repay loans taken to build temporary shelters or to repair damage

to existing structures. For example, in Ramechhap municipality in Ramechhap district, three families reported that they had sold their buffaloes and goats in order to repay loans taken out to construct temporary shelters.

In contrast to the relatively common practice of selling livestock, there were no reports of land having been sold in the wards visited. This seems mostly to be due to people waiting for government grants before deciding to take such drastic measures. However, two households in Ward 1 of Katunje in Okhaldhunga district told researchers that they had already borrowed money to build houses and that they would have to resort to selling their land eventually if they could not repay their loans through other means. Any households who do try to sell land are likely to be thwarted by the general uncertainty regarding the safety of rebuilding within earthquake-affected regions, which may put many potential buyers off, particularly in the highly affected wards. A respondent in Ward 8 of Baruwa VDC, Sindhupalchowk district, who was trying to sell land had not yet found a buyer. He acknowledged that people are not going to buy land without a proper geological assessment of the area. Similarly, another individual in Ward 9 of Prapcha VDC in Okhaldhunga district said, “even if we plan to sell our land, who will buy land in this risky area where landslides may sweep away everything at any moment?”

Migration and remittances

Migration was already a common phenomenon in the districts visited and research did not confirm a clear trend in the post-earthquake rate of out-migration.

Migration outside of Nepal for employment was common across all the wards visited. Many households in all the districts visited have family members working overseas. As most households pursue subsistence farming, and resort to other occupations to sustain their families, many people prefer to go abroad or to urban centers within Nepal to generate income for their families. Among the six districts studied, the rate of international migration for employment was highest in Syangja, Gorkha, and Sindhupalchowk, where a majority of households had at least one member of

the family working abroad. Okhaldhunga district had the lowest rate of migration.

There was little evidence to suggest that the overall flow of migration had been affected by the earthquakes. Respondents in many communities confirmed that they will continue to seek to send family members abroad to earn remittances. They did not, however, report that they were planning to migrate specifically because of the economic stresses caused by the earthquakes.

Researchers did interview a small number of individuals who had been migrant workers prior to the earthquakes and had subsequently returned to Nepal. It appeared prompted by the disaster to stay in Nepal.

In Aarukharka VDC in Syangja district, a man who had recently returned from Malaysia has decided not to go back because he has to assist in rebuilding his damaged house. Similarly, in Barpak VDC in Gorkha district, four of the returnees did not want to go back. As well as having to rebuild their homes, they felt there was the potential for increased job opportunities at higher wage rates in the village when reconstruction begins. These were isolated instances and the field research did not clearly establish a wider trend of migrants returning home in the months since the earthquake.⁴⁶

Remittances constitute an important share of the income for the majority of households in most of the affected areas. Except in a few wards, there was little evidence of an increase in the volume of remittances after the monsoon.

Remittances were a major source of income of the people in all of the VDCs visited during the research. However, for most families the remittances received were not sufficient to rebuild their homes. A significant portion of remittances received go into paying back

loans taken for the migrant's travel to the destination country. Much of the rest is spent on household needs. As a result, even families receiving remittances are likely to have to depend on government subsidies or on loans to rebuild their houses.

In the wards visited, although the volume of remittances had increased in the pre-monsoon period, the levels appear not to have changed since then. The research data indicates that since the monsoon remittances increased in five wards visited during the research, while in two wards remittances decreased. In the other 29 wards there was either no change or no information available.

Interestingly, researchers found that few people in Ward 5 of Barpak VDC in Gorkha district had asked their family members working abroad to save their earnings for now and send it only when the construction of the family homes began. This finding echoed the widely held expectation amongst respondents that the volume of remittances would grow once fully-fledged reconstruction begins once the eventual assistance from the government is confirmed to be insufficient for building houses.

⁴⁶ Official statistics suggest a trend of migrant workers returning to take care of their families, but the wards studied only provided anecdotal support for this finding. See Ratha et.al. 2016 "Migration and Remittances – Recent Developments and Outlook" Migration and Development Brief 26, April 2016, World Bank, Washington, DC <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/661301460400427908/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief26.pdf>



Chapter 8.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Photo: Alok Pokharel

Evidence from the second round of qualitative field research, conducted in February-March 2016, indicates that the impacts of the disaster are still being felt by thousands in affected districts. The field visits found that the slow pace of reconstruction and recovery efforts is taking a toll on households and communities. Earthquake survivors endured difficult monsoon and winter seasons, often with inadequate shelter, leading to discomfort and sickness. This may well be repeated in 2016 given that many people remain in temporary shelters. The economic strain on households is also clear as rates of borrowing are trending upwards, a negative development exacerbated by price increases related to the economic blockade along the Indian border. While markets are returning to normal, and people are returning to their work, borrowing will likely increase over the coming months, with the potential to lead to rising indebtedness and, potentially, the sale of assets.

The strain of this slow recovery is starting to emerge in community dynamics and public sentiment. While social cohesion on the whole has not significantly worsened, anecdotal cases of overt discrimination and disputes along ethnic or caste lines seem to be increasing. Frustration with the aid and support received also is being expressed regularly, with the contentious and confusing process of damage assessments seeming to have caused the most anger and mistrust. Coordination and communication challenges have hampered recovery efforts and impacted citizen perceptions of the relief and reconstruction efforts, as households have found themselves waiting for clarification and information

that will affect their decisions on how to rebuild their lives.

Review of the information collected in the field has led the authors to the following conclusions, which link to recommendations for the Government of Nepal and aid providers.

① **Damage assessments were perceived by many as unfair, non-transparent and poorly organized, leading to frustration and mistrust.**

Field research found significant levels of dissatisfaction with the damage assessment process and often the results. Thousands of complaints were received in affected districts, but the non-transparent way that districts tried to address those complaints led to suspicions of preferential or unfair treatment. The NRA has used CBS enumerators to produce a third round of assessments. It is clear that regardless of methodology, there will be complaints and dissatisfaction. There is a need for better efforts to provide information to citizens on the process and methodology used, and the implications of the assessment for the potential support they might receive. Information efforts need to better prepare local officials to respond to queries from local residents, while also ensuring clear information is spread widely across the affected areas. Specific guidelines on grey area issues that have emerged in the first two rounds of damage assessment, such as clarifying the criteria used to define households, are needed.



Photo: Alok Pokharel

It should be anticipated that the latest assessment will lead to changes in the classification for some households found to be ‘fully damaged’ or ‘partially damaged’ in the second assessment. Any changes are almost certain to result in further complaints and petitions for reclassification. In the case of the DDRC-led assessments, responses to complaints have been ad hoc and without the use of a clear and standard methodology for adjudicating disputes. This, again, led to perceptions of unfair treatment and political manipulation. There is a need to prepare for this reality with a clear and transparent dispute resolution mechanism that can work quickly through any complaints.

Recommendation 1: Develop a uniform dispute settlement mechanism with clear procedures to process the complaints that will emerge from the NRA-led assessment.

Recommendation 2: Proactively provide information about the assessment in affected areas so people understand how it was conducted, and the criteria used for damage classifications.

② The focus on physical reconstruction has limited progress on other aspects of recovery.

Research found that government officials at the district and VDC levels were largely thinking about recovery in terms of rebuilding the physical

infrastructure that was destroyed and damaged. This has limited the attention paid to a wide range of other issues critical for recovery. Local needs relating to livelihoods, economic recovery, dealing with the psycho-social impacts of the disaster, disability, and health care need to be better understood and responded to. Beyond initial reporting on earthquake impacts carried out by VDC secretaries in the weeks after the quakes, government assessments have focused overwhelmingly on the damage to physical infrastructure. Taking a broader view of the impacts of the earthquakes, and resulting needs, would help actors better prepare for long term recovery.

Recommendation 3: Support needs assessments that look beyond the reconstruction of physical infrastructure and collate information in coordination mechanisms to develop a shared understanding of needs between government, NGOs, the UN, and foreign agencies.

③ Coordination has remained a challenge – both between levels of government as well as with non-government aid providers.

A number of findings from the fieldwork point to continued challenges with coordination. Information did not always flow effectively within the national, district, and VDC levels, and between the government, NGOs, and foreign agencies. The

DDRCs and RDCs have become less active in recent months, contributing to a general reduction in information flows between actors. This might potentially compromise coordination efforts going forward. As the NRA takes the lead of the reconstruction process, coordination efforts will be critical to efficient and smooth reconstruction, especially given overlapping mandates with other government agencies and local officials. Already during the field research, the first NRA-led assessments were causing some confusion with local officials, including Chief District Officers, sharing that they had been surprised about the timing of the assessments and were uninformed about the methodology being used.

This need for a refocus on coordination extends to the work on reconstruction and recovery being done by non-governmental organizations, national and international, in coordination with local governments. Perceptions that non-government aid was supply-driven or poorly targeted were reported in many locations studied, in part because of inadequate communication efforts at the VDC level. As longer term plans and projects for recovery and reconstruction take shape, new mechanisms to help with the planning and coordination of assistance might be needed as those that emerged in the emergency relief period are less active than before.

Recommendation 4: Ensure clarity in reconstruction roles and responsibilities at the district and implementation level between the NRA, line ministries, and local government bodies.

Recommendation 5: Encourage donors and the government to strengthen and revitalize existing coordination mechanisms, or shift to new mechanisms for long-term recovery cooperation.

4 Aid delivery, including blanket and targeted distribution, remains contentious.

During this round of research more frustration was expressed with perceived inequities in aid distribution than in the early post-earthquake months. During the emergency aid distribution, handing out aid equally across and within communities seemed to be the targeting strategy that was best for social cohesion. In the recent round of research, complaints were shared with researchers both about targeted approaches to aid distribution as well as equal distribution strategies. In some locations, targeting aid based on socio-economic need often would often be

seen as prioritizing one ethnic or caste group over others. Prioritizing displaced persons over local communities that were also affected caused frustration as well. At the same time, equal distribution of aid was viewed by some as leading to high caste or elite capture of resources, diverting support to many households who did not need it as much as others.

Often frustrations with either targeting approach were rooted in existing social hierarchies and tensions. Given that overall levels of aid might be expected to decrease, it can be expected that targeted assistance will be more common. As such, it will be critical that locally sensitive targeting strategies are employed by aid providers to avoid creating resentment between population groups. Clear communication and engagement with recipient communities, while time consuming, will help communities collectively own targeting decisions; if done well, this will help negate misperceptions about how aid is distributed.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen locally sensitive approaches to targeting aid distribution to avoid contributing to tensions.

5 Significant interest was expressed in government programs relating to credit and soft loans.

Research indicated that rates of borrowing seem to be increasing across the earthquake-affected districts. In addition, many households expressed an interest in, or hope for, soft loans being provided through government programs. These are needed for the reconstruction of houses, but also for capital to restart businesses and for livelihood needs for those families who have had their source of income disrupted. While there has been some information about housing loans for reconstruction from the NRA and other arms of the government, specific information on any new programs remains unclear to many. Without clear policy and available credit, the potential for an increased reliance on money lenders, who charge high interest rates, is real; this could lead to the greater sale of assets. Consideration of potential models for loan or credit programs to support reconstruction and small business recovery should be a priority for government and donors.

Recommendation 7: Publicize existing loan programs more widely, make them easier to apply for, and clarify emerging plans for additional lending programs.

6 Economic recovery efforts are taking place at the household level but need support from coordinated and clear government policy.

Researchers observed that most individual households and businesses had resumed normal economic activity. This household-driven economic recovery is an important step, but there are wider issues that are limiting recovery. Coordinated government responses to constraints, in addition to the possibility of soft loans or credit programs, are needed to build on this momentum. Challenges that will require a coordinated government response include the need to repair water infrastructure, something that has affected farmers in areas where water sources have dried up or irrigation systems were damaged. A concerted effort to help the tourism sector recover also seems necessary. Households dependent on tourism reported that they were holding out until the next trekking season starts, and hoping for a recovery in the number of tourists who come to Nepal. At the household level there is little they can do to encourage a return of tourists. A more coordinated government and donor push is needed to attract tourists, repair trekking trails, and work with related businesses on ensuring standards of safety, access, and comfort.

Recommendation 8: Prioritize efforts to repair or adjust water infrastructure.

Recommendation 9: Boost efforts to attract tourists and focus on repairing trekking trails for the next trekking season.

7 The ambiguous role of political parties in local relief and recovery opens space for potential misuse of influence.

In the months immediately following the disaster, the role of the DDRCs and RDCs in coordinating aid and targeting relief was critical. Political party actors who knew their VDCs well played an important role on these committees and were generally considered to have made positive contributions. In recent months, as the activity of the DDRCs and RDCs has decreased, the role of political parties in the recovery process has become less clear. During this phase of research, most of the discussion around political parties was focused on suspicions that political party leaders had been using their influence to affect damage assessments, rather than making positive contributions. In part this unclear role might reflect the uncertain role of the RDCs and DDRCs as the recovery process shifts from emergency relief to longer term rebuilding and recovery projects. Accountability for local

actors involved in the recovery process must start with clarity of roles and responsibilities; the current situation does not provide that.⁴⁷ Either these mechanisms should give way to a return to the use of local decision-making processes used for all local budgetary decisions in non-emergency times, or they should be given a clear role with responsibilities that will allow them to add value.

Recommendation 10: Revisit the role of RDCs to either end this mechanism or strengthen it by providing a clear mandate among the multiple reconstruction bodies.

8 Opportunities to give WCF coordinators a greater role were observed in many locations.

The important role that WCF coordinators played in supporting aid delivery was noted as having had a positive effect both on the standing of effective individuals in their communities. Despite this, these actors were largely absent from actual decision making processes. In some locations, frustrations with the perceived unresponsiveness of VDC secretaries and district level actors led communities to request that WCF coordinators get involved in helping them resolve pressing issues. This emerging legitimacy is still limited, but it potentially creates opportunities for WCF coordinators to play a positive role in supporting the targeting and coordination of assistance going forward, to ensure that programs and strategies are not overly reliant on VDC secretaries.

Recommendation 11: Seek opportunities to engage WCFs more in decision-making and the coordination of assistance.

9 There is significant confusion and frustration around long-term resettlement plans for displaced households.

While the majority of households whose homes were damaged or destroyed were able to create temporary shelter on their own land, many in the hardest hit districts were displaced and have

⁴⁷ A possible more formal role for political party members could come after the May 2016 guidelines on the mobilization of local volunteers by the NRA. <http://myrepublica.com/politics/story/42398/nra-issues-guidelines-for-volunteer-mobilization.html>. Also, the May 2016 Post-Disaster Recovery Framework proposes an entirely new District Coordination Committee (DCC) to coordinate and monitor reconstruction in each of the 31 affected districts. The DCC will be led by Members of Parliament from the area on a rotational basis.

moved within their wards, VDCs, or even further away. Many of the displaced are finding or building temporary shelters on public and private land. It is unclear how many of those individuals ultimately will be able to return to their places of origin, and it is also uncertain how long any such return might take. The level of destruction has made some settlements uninhabitable, the threat of landslides is affecting many, and the economic capacity to rebuild is limited. This situation creates challenges both for those who have been displaced, but also for those communities that are accommodating displaced persons. The location of temporary shelters and groupings of displaced persons are increasingly causing tensions due to perceived land-grabbing or ethnic or caste discrimination. General frustration with the need to share resources and land are emerging in some locations. There is a short term need to determine how displaced persons can best be supported through another monsoon season. There is also a need for a longer-term plan and policy for the permanent resettlement of displaced persons.

Recommendation 12: Generate a plan or policy to identify and support displaced persons who will need temporary as well as permanent resettlement.

10 Uncertainty linked to a lack of geological assessments is creating challenges.

The fear of landslides and uncertainty around the safety of many settlement areas have prevented many households from making decisions on resettling or rebuilding. This concern also affects some farmers who fear that their land might be at risk. The actual level of threat in locations where these concerns exist are unclear, but the lack of objective guidance is causing many to delay decisions about resettlement or rebuilding, as well as potentially resulting in some households moving back to at-risk areas. A plan for conducting more thorough geological hazard assessments, and providing information to affected households, is needed to address these challenges.

Recommendation 13: Introduce a plan for conducting and sharing the results of geological assessments to identify risks and hazards in affected areas.

11 Many households are not ready for the 2016 monsoon season.

Field research suggested that many of the earthquake affected families do not have adequate

shelter. While there is insufficient time for reconstruction or significant improvements to temporary shelters before the monsoon, efforts to prepare to deal with the consequences of the prevalence of inadequate shelter during the monsoon are needed, including medicine and care for those made ill by the damp conditions and prevalence of pests.

Recommendation 14: Take efforts to respond to monsoon challenges as an urgent priority.

12 Limited attention has been given to the psychological and social impact of the earthquakes.

Many households expressed fear and anxiety, and it was reported that many children remain scared and anxious a year after the disaster. In addition, there are reports of increased alcohol dependence from many communities. These cannot be confirmed but were raised frequently enough to raise concerns. A rise in perceived insecurity among women was also noted, particularly among those in temporary shelters, where there have been anecdotes of sexual and gender-based violence in some locations. While official statistics do not show significant increases in crime, there are enough qualitative indicators to suggest that these issues need further attention.

Recommendation 15: Invest in counseling to improve psycho-social health, especially for children.

Recommendation 16: Increase focus on protection issues, particularly women's insecurity, especially for those in temporary shelters.



Photo: Amanda Gurung

Annex A: Methods

This report is based on in-depth qualitative field research conducted from 20 February–8 March 2016. Six teams, each of three researchers, visited six earthquake-affected districts: Gorkha, Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk, Solukhumbu, 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).⁴⁸ 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, in the case of new districts, and to gather information on the 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. This facilitated comparisons of the impact, emerging issues, and the disaster response across research sites and also the recovery process since the first round of research in June 2015. 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 earthquakes; aid recipients; and those who have not received assistance. In total 459 key informant interviews were conducted across the 36 wards, and 239 people participated in focus group discussions. Thirty-one of the individuals interviewed were district level officials, while 37 were VDC/municipality level officials. Out of the 698 people interviewed, 292 were female. Table A.1 below shows the number of respondents engaged in each of the six research districts.

A common list of key informants was used by all research teams to set initial interviews in each location (at the district, VDC, and ward levels). A snowballing approach was used for subsequent interviews that sought to explore the key local themes of recovery, as well as to engage and identify specific individuals identified as knowledgeable or influential. Focus group discussions were organized to explore specific aspects of the local recovery process.

Table A.1: Number of respondents by district

| District | Focus group participants | | Key informant interview respondents | | Total |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male | |
| Syangja | 32 | 21 | 18 | 49 | 120 |
| Solukhumbu | 20 | 12 | 23 | 34 | 89 |
| Sindhupalchowk | 31 | 7 | 22 | 56 | 116 |
| Ramechhap | 22 | 20 | 4 | 45 | 91 |
| Okhaldhunga | 17 | 9 | 52 | 97 | 175 |
| Gorkha | 43 | 5 | 8 | 51 | 107 |
| Total | 165 | 74 | 127 | 332 | 698 |

⁴⁸ Teams visited 15 VDCs and three municipalities (Ramechhap municipality in Ramechhap, Dudhkunda municipality in Solukhumbu, and Waling municipality in Syangja).

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

Districts

Districts were selected to vary by level of earthquake damage as per the categorization of the impact on districts according to the PDNA. Three severely hit, one crisis hit, one hit with heavy losses, and one hit districts were selected. In order to ensure that the districts selected reflected all impact levels, two new districts, Ramechhap and Solukhumbu, were added in place of Dolakha and Makawanpur, which were studied in the first round of research.

- Severely hit: Gorkha, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk
- Crisis hit: Okhaldhunga
- Hit with heavy losses: Solukhumbu
- Hit: Syangja

VDCs/municipalities

Within each district, three VDCs/municipalities of varying impact and accessibility levels were chosen. In the case of the districts that were part of the IRM-1, the same VDCs/municipalities were chosen for the IRM-2 research. In the case of the two new districts that were added in this round, the same criteria that were used to select VDCs/municipality in IRM-1 were used. That is, VDCs/municipalities were chosen on the basis of the levels of impact and accessibility. With regard to the levels of impact, VDCs/municipalities

were categorized as: high, when more than 50% of houses were destroyed; medium, when 20-50% of houses had been destroyed; and low, when 10-20% houses were destroyed. 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.

Table A.2: Criteria for VDC/municipality selection

| District | Level of impact | Level of accessibility |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Hit (1 district, 3 VDCs/municipalities) • Syangja | High (1 VDC/municipality) | Either high or low depending on where the most highly-affected area is |
| | Medium (1 VDC/municipality) | High (1 VDC/municipality) |
| | Low (1 VDC/municipality) | Low (1 VDC/municipality) |
| Hit with heavy loss (1 district, 3 VDCs/municipalities) • Solukhumbu | High (1VDC/municipality) | High (1 VDC/municipality) |
| | Medium (1 VDC/municipality) | Low (1 VDC/municipality) |
| | Medium (1 VDC/municipality) | High (1 VDC/municipality) |
| Crisis hit (1 district, 3 VDCs/municipalities) • Okhaldhunga | High (1 VDC/municipality) | Low (1 VDC/municipality) |
| | Medium (1 VDC/municipality) | High (1 VDC/municipality) |
| | Low (1 VDC/municipality) | High (2 VDCs/municipalities) |

| District | Level of impact | Level of accessibility |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Severely hit (3 districts, 9 VDCs/municipalities) • Gorkha • Ramechhap • Sindhupalchowk | High (5 VDCs/municipalities) | Low (3 VDCs/municipalities) High (2 VDCs/municipalities) |
| | Medium (3 VDCs/MCs) | Low (1 VDC/municipality) High (1 VDC/municipality) |
| | Low (1 VDCs/municipality) | Either high or low depending on where the least affected area is |

Research teams conducted selection of the 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 first round of research in early June 2015. In the case of the two new districts, Solukhumbu and Ramechhap, researchers gathered information on levels of impacts and remoteness from official damage assessment data and from key informants at the beginning of the research in late February 2016.

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 used for the analysis throughout this report – see below. See Table A.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 and/or walk away from the hub. In the case of the districts that were part of the IRM-1, the wards that were selected in the first round of research were continued in this round also.

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

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; (ii) damage assessment data available at the VDC or district headquarters in the case of two new districts; and (iii) the percentage of homes rendered unlivable (but not completely destroyed/collapsed).

Table A.3: VDCs visited and ward classification

| District impact | District | VDC/municipality | Ward # | Ward impact |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------|-------------|
| Severely hit | Gorkha | Barpak | A | Highest |
| | | | B | Highest |
| | | Dhuwakot | A | Medium |
| | | | B | High |
| | | Tanglichok | A | High |
| | | | B | High |
| | Sindhupalchowk | Baruwa | A | Highest |
| | | | B | Highest |
| | | Lisankhu | A | High |
| | | | B | High |
| | | Syaule | A | High |
| | | | B | Highest |
| Ramechhap | Bamtibhandar | A | High | |
| | | B | High | |
| | Ramechhap | A | High | |
| | | B | High | |
| | Doramba | A | Medium | |
| | | B | Medium | |
| Crisis hit | Okhaldhunga | Baruneshwor | A | High |
| | | | B | High |
| | | Katunje | A | Medium |
| | | | B | Medium |
| | | Prapcha | A | High |
| | | | B | High |
| Hit with heavy loss | Solukhumbu | Nele | A | Medium |
| | | | B | High |
| | | Kerung | A | Medium |
| | | | B | Medium |
| | | Dudhkunda | A | Low |
| | | | B | Medium |
| Low | Syangja | Aarukharka | A | Low |
| | | | B | Low |
| | | Shreekrishna Gandaki | A | Low |
| | | | B | Low |
| | | Waling | A | Medium |
| | | | B | Medium |

Annex B: Eathquake Impacts⁴⁹

Figure B.1: Percentage of fully and partially damaged houses by district



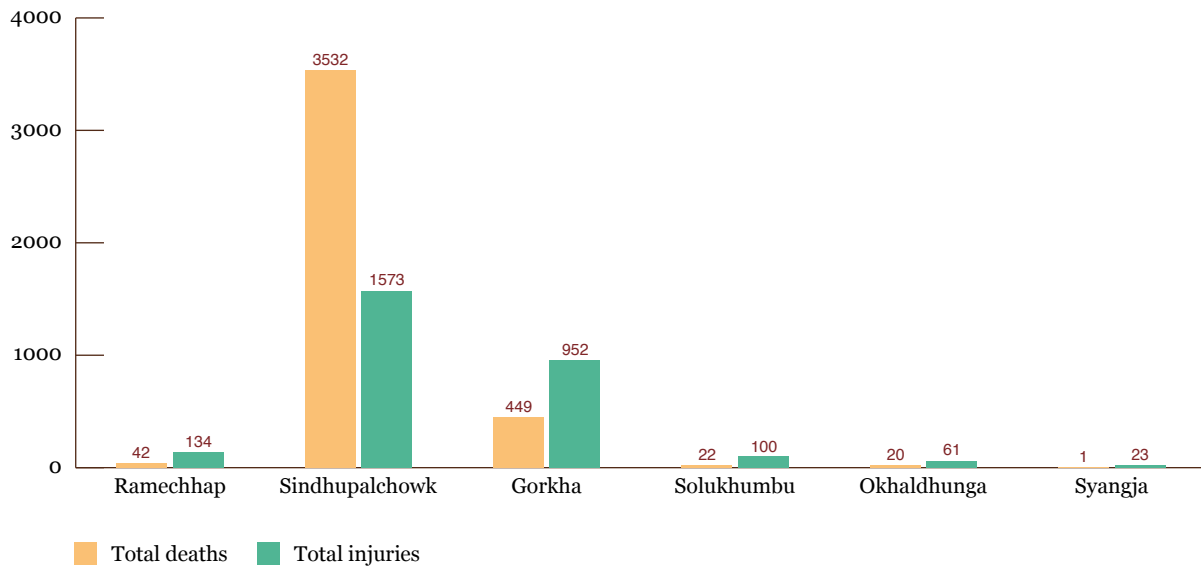
The earthquakes of 25 April and 12 May 2015 and subsequent aftershocks caused 8,856 deaths and left 22,309 injured. 602,257 houses were fully damaged and 285,099 were partially damaged rendering most of them unlivable. In Sindhupalchowk and Gorkha, two of the three severely hit districts, the official count of houses that were reported fully and partially damaged is higher than the total number of houses in the 2011 census. This may have been caused by

underreporting in the 2011 census, flawed damage assessments, or families splitting in the aftermath of the earthquakes to claim separate relief.

Despite suffering similar level of damages to houses as the other severely hit districts of Gorkha and Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk had 3,532 deaths compared to 42 in Ramechhap and 449 in Gorkha.

⁴⁹ <http://www.drrportal.gov.np>

Figure B.2: Numbers of deaths and injured in districts visited



In addition to the impacts of the earthquakes, survivors also had to endure hardships during the monsoon and winter due to lack of proper shelter. This was particularly difficult for people who were displaced from

their original locations, and households who were wrongly categorized as ‘partially’ damaged making them ineligible for grants to build temporary shelters.



Photo: Amanda Gurung



The Asia Foundation



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
स्वीस सरकार विकास सहयोग एजेंसि





The Asia Foundation



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
श्रीम भस्कर विकास महायोग एमडब्ल्यू

DEMOCRACY
RESOURCE CENTER