



# Nepal earthquake appeal response review

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September 2015



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# Summary

Over 8790 people were killed and more than 22 300 injured when a 7.8 Magnitude earthquake struck Nepal's Gorkha district on Saturday April 25, 2015, followed by a second earthquake measuring 7.3 on Tuesday May 12 close to Mount Everest. Hundreds of aftershocks - many large - since remind terrified people of the scale of the disaster. The damage and loss is calculated at some US\$ seven billion, with over half a million houses partially or fully destroyed, and the Government of Nepal estimates some additional 700 000 Nepalis will be pushed into poverty as a result<sup>1</sup>.

The earthquake was the biggest disaster of any kind Nepal had experienced since the earthquake of 1934. To almost everybody therefore this was something new, for which government and civil society had no experience. Immediately after the disaster, preparedness measures such as government coordination, some prepositioning and clusters at district level worked well. Many preparedness efforts of some international NGOs (INGOs) in anticipation of a big earthquake had however been modelled on the Kathmandu valley; this earthquake primarily affected rural areas, although three of the crisis-hit districts (located in the Kathmandu valley) are urban. Those affected here, such as low-income renters who do not receive government's housing compensation, have largely gone unnoticed by INGOs.

The operating environment in Nepal provides considerable challenges. Access to remote mountainous communities, many of which are widely disbursed and small, makes coverage hard. The Government provided a strong response, which while positive and quick at first, led after some months to INGOs and others having to stall actions while decisions are delayed. Nepal has a recent history of complex governance, marred over the last few years 'by political instability and violence'<sup>2</sup>. Districts interpret and apply rules differently, leading to a complicated operating environment. The country is at a critical juncture in the process of drafting its constitution, which continues to demand government and civil society efforts.

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

Following the initial distribution of relief, the primary needs now are for permanent housing (many villages were nearly or totally wiped out) and help in livelihoods recovery, which in rural areas is mostly agriculture and livestock. DEC/HC member agencies' responses so far in shelter have mostly comprised, beyond initial tarps, the provision of CGI (the default material across the response) and tools, and/or cash grants to enable purchasing of CGI. The challenge now is to shift gear to think of inputs into permanent housing, which are probably best served by providing quality and certified training to masons, carpenter and

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Nepal's Post Disaster Needs Assessment, <http://www.npc.gov.np/web/new/uploadedFiles/allFiles/PDNA-excutiveSummary.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Governance in Nepal, World Bank, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSAREGTOPPRI/SECDEV/0,,contentMDK:20584875~menuPK:496677~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:496671,00.html>

others, both to improve livelihood opportunities as well as to improve housing quality. Supporting traditional building approaches and use of traditional materials in seismically-safe ways presents an opportunity for INGOs and their partners to invest in long term recovery.

Energy now needs to go into helping communities recover using their own strengths to counter a sense of dependency that exists in some places. Part of this lies in clarity on what communities need and how best to help. Early reports of communities' feedback of the relief effort has been critical - in one survey<sup>3</sup> over half of respondents said they felt they were not being heard at all, and nearly two thirds said they were seeing no progress in the relief effort. Nearly three quarters (73%) of women said their needs were being met hardly, or not at all. Gender is an issue upon which agencies need to focus more; so is reaching the most marginalised, especially Dalit communities and others considered to be on the fringes of society. Rechecking with community members and on lists who might have been left off is therefore necessary.

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

Technology has also been put to good use with widespread use of mobile phones by field staff for more efficient assessments and monitoring. Effective information management initiatives such as the IFRC's Surge Information Management System (SIMS) sift and present complex information in easily digestible ways. INGOs (and others) need to do more of this: right now large inefficiencies exist in the ways information is exchanged, often in overly-complicated and poorly communicated ways. This happens between agencies and also from NGOs to communities. More space could be created in the recovery phase for collaborative reflection and learning, and greater thought and ingenuity needs to go into how information is presented.

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

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<sup>3</sup> The Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project's first Community Survey, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/community\\_survey\\_r1\\_1.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/community_survey_r1_1.pdf)

# Recommendations

	On page	CHS <sup>4</sup>
1. For the recovery, identify and address the needs of those excluded so far from the response, such as unreached VDCs and wards, those missed off registers, urban renters and the most marginalised in communities, and develop strategies to listen and respond to needs prioritised by people	6	1, 2, 4, 5
2. Get ready for the next disaster: apply the NRRC Nine Minimum Characteristics of a Resilient Community to recovery activities	8	3
3. Capitalise on the 'recovery window' to advocate for the passing of a world-leading Disaster Management Act that prioritises equity, inclusion and gender equality, and which stipulates dedicated local level government funds for emergency preparedness	10	2, 3
4. In cash distributions, be mindful of equity within communities and co-ordinate amounts and distribution modalities between agencies. Proactively facilitate learning and sharing to establish an evidence-base of what works	12	1, 2, 6, 7
5. Build the right housing based on listening to people's realities: support traditional building practices that use existing approaches and materials, adhering to seismic standards	13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
6. Invest in both safer rebuilding and future livelihoods by training women and men carpenters, plumbers, masons and others using recognised certified schemes such as CTEVT	13	3
7. Ensure an INGO collective voice in representing common issues to government and other stakeholders, making use of established networks such as AIN	17	6, 7
8. To contribute better to national and local NGO capacity, recovery plans must be jointly developed with NGO partners, wherein these partners have an equal stake in strategy, direction and sign off	20	3
9. Work collaboratively to improve two-way communication with communities to counter rumour, maintain clear and consistent messaging and to share feedback and analysis useful to agencies, co ordinating bodies and government. To ensure INGOs are listening to people, monitor and report on how programmes have adapted as a result of community feedback	22	4, 5, 7
10. To improve efficiency and effectiveness, invest in significantly improving communication between agencies, within clusters and to government making use of available and emerging digital tools.	23	7, 9

<sup>4</sup> Each recommendation relates to one or more commitments of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), which is in Annex One and at <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>



# Acronyms

AIN	Association of International NGOs
BRC	British Red Cross
CAC	Community awareness centre
CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership
CBDRR	Community based disaster risk reduction
CDMC	Community disaster management committee
CDRC	Central Disaster Relief Committee
CDO	Chief District Officer
CFW	Cash for work
CGI	Corrugated galvanised iron
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CIUD	Centre for integrated urban development
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CwC	Communicating with communities
CWG	Cash Working Group
CTEVT	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training
DART	Disaster assistance response team
DDRC	District Disaster Relief Committee
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DPNET	Disaster Preparedness Network Nepal
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DWCC	District WaSH Cluster Committee
DUDBC	Department of Urban Development and Building Construction
EMMA	Emergency Market Mapping Analysis
FACT	Field assessment coordination team
FGD	Focus group discussion
HAI	HelpAge International
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HC	Humanitarian Coalition
HLP	Housing, land and property rights
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IRW	Islamic Relief Worldwide
KI	Key informant
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
NEOC	National Emergency Operation Centre
NDRF	National disaster response framework
NFI	Non-food item
NPR	Nepali Rupee
NRA	National Reconstruction Authority
NRCS	Nepal Red Cross Society
NRRC	Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OPA	Older people's association
PA	Practical Action
PGVS	Poorvanchal Gramin Vikas Sansthan
PDM	Post distribution monitoring
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
PTSD	Post traumatic stress disorder
SAG	Strategic advisory group
SCF	Save the Children
SRMH	Sexual reproductive and maternal health
SIMS	Surge information management support
SOUP	Society of the urban poor
TLCs	Temporary learning centres
TWIG	Technical working group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VDC	Village development committee
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WV	World Vision

# Research approach

The principle activity for this review was a 12-day visit by the review team (five women and two men) to Districts affected by the earthquake, which took place 2-14 August 2015. The review team split into two gender-mixed teams. Activities comprised:

- Visits to affected communities. Locations of visits were suggested by DEC/HC members and agreed with the review team. The review team visited Dolakha, Gorkha, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Makwarpur, and Sindhupalchowk districts. A visit to Rasuwa was cancelled due to landslide risk
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with community members. FGDs were often gender separate and at other times mixed. FGDs and meetings sizes ranged from five to 75 people. In total 12 formal FGDs were held; informal discussions were also undertaken
- Meetings with government officials at district, VDC, municipality, ward and national level. 13 formal meetings were held, with attendance ranging from five to 35 people
- Key informant interviews with field personnel from DEC/HC members, NGO partners and non NGO partners. In total 21 formal meetings were held
- Key informant interviews with personnel from the Shelter Cluster, the Cash Working Group, OCHA, UN-Habitat, DFID, IFRC and the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project; also with member organisations AIN and the NGO Federation of Nepal
- A large number of informal conversations with DEC/HC members staff including country directors, theme leads, field staff and partner NGOs
- Round table discussions with DEC/HC members. Two were held. The first was an inception meeting on the first day of the visit, attended by 35 staff from DEC/HC members. At the meeting a 'world café' exercise was undertaken wherein groups reviewed each of the four main areas of enquiry (which form the four main sections of this review). The second meeting was held on the final day of the visit and was attended by 40 DEC/HC personnel and the IFRC. The ten recommendations were discussed and explored by small groups identifying three key actions for each.

A detailed timetable of activities including indicative numbers of people met with can be found in Annex Two. The research approach was qualitative and used open ended questions derived from the terms of reference provided by DEC/HC. Two sets of questions were formulated, for communities and key informants respectively, which can be found in Annex Three. Notes of all interviews and meetings were kept; interviewees were informed that anonymity would be assured for all views expressed. Findings were triangulated through other meetings and where necessary and checked for factual accuracy.

The review team formally met at the end of the first week to compare notes and to identify tentative recommendations. These then became hypotheses that were discussed and 'tested' in the second week. The final recommendations were presented for discussion at the final close out meeting held on the final day of the visit. Within that meeting participants 'tested' the recommendations by identifying for each recommendation three actions that might be taken in the next two to three years (see Annex Four for the results). Participants were also asked their advice for their successor for the next big disaster (see Annex Five).

Secondary data was also reviewed and included member agency proposals provided by DEC/HC. At the time of writing no DEC progress reports had been submitted; HC members' interim program reports were made available. No other reviews have been seen. Chief secondary sources of information have been derived from websites, for example from clusters, OCHA and the Government of Nepal, referenced in this review in footnotes.

A desk review was also undertaken concerning innovation. Eleven interviews with country directors, innovation and technology specialists, and policy and research staff (several of whom were identified during the visit to Nepal) were undertaken on their perceptions of innovation. The three questions asked and findings are presented in Annex Six, while a text box in the report summarises the key findings.

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

## Acknowledgements

The team is very grateful indeed to all those who gave their time and energy towards the production of this review, in particular community members, governmental officials at all levels, all DEC/HC members and their partners, national NGOs, donors and those from respective United Nations organisations, network organisations, clusters and the Red Cross Movement.

In particular we are grateful to Ruth Newman from BRC for organising the programme and to BRC for hosting the visit.

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September 2015

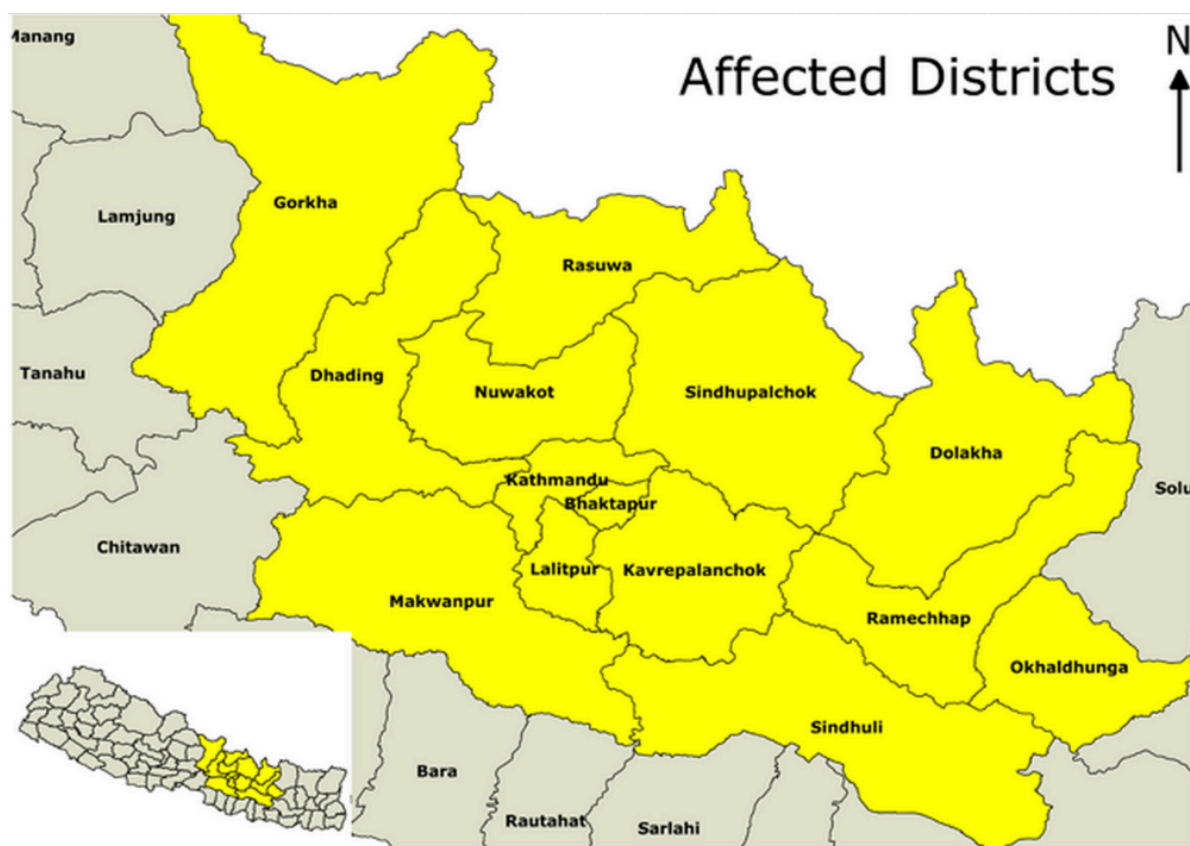
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# Priority areas, gaps and unmet needs



Fourteen affected district as identified by the Government of Nepal. Source: QuakeRelief.info<sup>5</sup>

## Priority areas

In the days following the earthquake, even those whose homes were intact were reluctant to sleep in them and tarpaulins and other basic food and hygiene materials were required for almost 100% of the population in the worst affected districts. As people began to recover from the initial trauma, temporary shelter, sanitation, need to clear debris and repair roads, temporary infrastructure for schools and health posts emerged as needs. In urban areas, it was often the older parts of town that faced greater destruction. Here, debris removal was critical to make roads usable.

Four months on from the earthquake, the priority needs across all communities visited, and substantiated by other assessments, were for permanent housing, temporary shelter, livelihoods and preparations for winter (climatization/winterization).

Concerning **permanent housing**, the Government's Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA)<sup>6</sup> estimates that housing damage is just under half (49%) of total economic losses, which according to the Shelter Cluster amounts to over half a million houses<sup>7</sup>. Within communities visited, most people stated they would begin rebuilding in November following the monsoon and large festivals.

<sup>5</sup> <http://kathmandulivinglabs.github.io/quake-maps/>

<sup>6</sup> [http://icnr2015.mof.gov.np/page/post\\_disaster\\_needs\\_assessment](http://icnr2015.mof.gov.np/page/post_disaster_needs_assessment)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sheltercluster.org/response/nepal-earthquake-2015>

At the time of writing, the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction within the Ministry of Urban Development is finalising designs for shelter reconstruction. There are 29 designs which range from a modest two room single storey building to a large three-storey house, with an estimated construction price range of NPR200 000 for the first design to NPR three million for the 29<sup>th</sup> design. There is no urban or rural distinction given. The designs were formulated by an architect over a six-week period and subsequently checked by a committee within the DUDBC. The first house design, made of stone and local materials with a CGI roof, is most likely to be the only option for poorer rural dwellers, and considering increased materials cost, the price may well be far higher than the sum estimated. The Government has fixed a cash payment of NPR200 000 for those whose houses were destroyed. The assessment for permanent house damage is to take place later in 2015. UNOPS will lead the study, and the current intention is that some 2000 teams of three will undertake the survey.

For Phase Two (recovery) operations, if DEC/HC members are to respond to stated need then they will have to become engaged in permanent housing. Whether they build directly, via local partners (INGOs cannot implement directly in Nepal<sup>8</sup>) remains a question, given the complexities of this sector. Better investments are likely to be approaches that involve the building of skills of masons, plumbers and carpenters through recognised training programmes. Other activities could include providing assistance in access to quality materials through cash programming where markets function, or the direct provision of materials, and with technical assistance and support to Government in monitoring and enforcing building codes and quality of material (this is discussed further in chapter two).

Regarding **temporary shelter**, the principle established by the shelter cluster was to provide people materials and some guidance and support to construct temporary shelter, but not to construct the shelters for people. This is consistent with lessons from Pakistan following the earthquake, wherein people-led reconstruction was the norm. Guidance from the shelter cluster promoted the distribution of corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) sheets - the default response across all agencies - and toolkits to enable people to construct their own temporary shelters, supplementing these materials with locally available materials such as wood and old CGI sheets from partially damaged homes. Many temporary shelters also included the emergency shelter tarpaulins in the construction of their temporary home. The materials distributed were similar across all agencies, with some differences in the support and guidance provided to people in the construction of their temporary shelters. Several DEC/HC members trained carpenters in each community to construct shelters and shared latrines, and arranged for assistance for households that needed support. Some agencies provided an orientation in the use of these materials and ideas for their use. Concern Worldwide offered elderly and women headed households assistance to deliver their CGI sheets and shelter toolkits, paying for transport and/ or porters while Christian Aid helped some households construct temporary shelters from salvaged materials as model houses for others to see and learn from.

Overall the quality of temporary shelters varies widely. For this review a number of those seen were of very poor quality, where families had been given materials but seemingly no instruction on how to use them. The predominantly rural nature of this disaster, with many communities in far-flung and hard to reach places, makes the providing of meaningful technical assistance hard (the small number of shelter specialists is stretched), and partner NGOs, almost all of whom have no previous shelter experience, are being called upon to engage in shelter.

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<sup>8</sup> In the immediate relief period this rule was relaxed

## Operational context

The operational context presented several challenges. These include:

- The terrain of remote and landslide-prone communities presented a significant challenge to distribute relief materials, as in several areas these needed to be air dropped in by helicopter. In Dolakha district some areas have still not been reached
- According to the World Bank (see reference below), 'Nepal's recent history is marred by political instability and violence'. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2014 (see reference below) ranks Nepal at 126 out of 176 countries
- Differences between districts. The earthquake response is focused on 14 districts, three of which are in Kathmandu valley. Within each district the Chief District Officer (CDO) is the principal authority. Decisions and actions between different districts can vary a lot. As one key informant noted, there are '14 responses in one' Decisions therefore from central government may play out quite differently from one district to another
- Shortly after the earthquake, political decisions, for example concerning taxes on imports, were changed, meaning aid agencies needed to respond, change or wait depending on circumstances
- Breaking out of 'relief mode'. In the words of one NGO field worker, 'it is only about relief; there is nothing on development', while another senior INGO manager said, 'we're still in delivery mode; the conversations aren't happening'. While relief to recovery is the discussion in agency offices, this message is still not being fully communicated to NGOs and communities. Part of the reason may lie in INGOs and others waiting for government to issue guidance, for example in the formation of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA, announced in mid-August)
- A sense of dependency. Linked to the last point, among the communities visited for this review, an over-riding sense of waiting for further assistance was apparent. In many villages such as in Gorkha where the scale of devastation reached nearly 100%, help is needed; yet many agencies might encourage communities to take greater control of their own fate, and make links between small actions taken now to a more secure future. As one key informant stated, 'Don't make people beggars'
- Criticism of international actors. One agency key informant observed, there is 'general hostility to international actors'. Concerning INGOs this extends to regular criticism in the press
- National NGO capacity varies greatly, from experienced and effective NGOs to those who may have little or no experience of disaster preparedness or response
- Capacities of various DDRCs varied significantly, especially as there were transfers in senior district positions in several districts soon after the earthquake
- Shifting beneficiary lists and lack of secondary data for crosschecking lists. This combined with the absence of locally elected officials, and political party presence at VDC level has raised many concerns about the politicization of beneficiary lists
- Site selection in urban areas for temporary shelters has been challenging because of the lack of space and delays in clearing rubble.

Governance in Nepal, World Bank,

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSAREGTOPPRI/SECDEV/0,,contentMDK:20584875~menuPK:496677~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:496671,00.html>

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2014,

<https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>

**Livelihoods** for most rural communities visited meant seeds for planting and livestock. During the relief period cash grants (government and or NGOs), cash for work initiatives and seed distributions were intended to support those most affected until they could resume their livelihood activities. In some regions, farmlands were affected by the earthquake with cracks in the land appearing causing instability in farm lands, or because of landslides. For others earlier engaged in irrigation farming, shifting of natural springs downstream meant they were unable to irrigate rice fields. At the time of writing, several DEC/HC members are conducting livelihoods reviews to inform the recovery phase of work. Livelihoods options are being explored in the areas of irrigated agriculture and forestry, shelter reconstruction and tourism. Oxfam is conducting a market study on the labour market, with the intent of targeting landless people in Kathmandu valley. They are also linking with CARE on livelihoods with an agenda to try to include more women in innovative or alternative markets. Given the scale of reconstruction that will be required over the next few years, masons, plumbers and other building craftspeople will be in demand. Agencies can explore supporting women and men to train for these trades (discussed later). Conversations with district government officials indicated that their priority is shelter and infrastructure, and currently less so on livelihoods.

Concerning **climatization/winterization**, an immediate need is the provision of stoves, foam mattresses and blankets. If these are available via markets then cash grants may help; otherwise agencies will need to consider distributions.

## Gaps and unmet needs

The Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project's first Community Survey<sup>9</sup>, produced by Ground Truth Solutions, makes for sobering reading, which this review believes all DEC/HC members and partners should read and digest. The survey reports widespread dissatisfaction from communities with the response so far. Key issues include: a feeling that aid is not fairly distributed; that NGOs are not listening well enough (a finding states 'almost half of respondents feel they are not heard at all', while another states 'When women were asked if their particular problems are being addressed, a resounding 73% said 'very little' or 'not at all''); that 58% of respondents see little or no progress in the relief effort; that main problems are not being addressed (primarily permanent housing, as noted above); and a lack of information.

A largely unmet need concerns the relative lack of engagement by members in urban areas: while three of the 14 districts affected by the earthquake are predominantly urban, few DEC/HC members were engaged in urban response (as one senior UN official stated, 'INGOs are missing in the urban landscape'). The urban nature of the disaster is deceptive: buildings in Kathmandu largely stayed up, although in some areas such as Bhaktapur, where 82% of houses reported damage,<sup>10</sup> the interiors of many buildings were damaged. In these circumstances low-income renters suffer the most: ineligible for housing cash grants many are resorting to living in makeshift shelters on open ground. There has also been widespread damage to water supply systems.

Other current gaps and unmet needs include:

- Effective participation of women in preparedness or local governance institutions – in some of the areas visited women felt that while they discussed issues of particular

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[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/community\\_survey\\_r1\\_1.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/community_survey_r1_1.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> See the shelter cluster Bhaktapur factsheet:

[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach\\_npl\\_factsheet\\_bhaktapurdistrict\\_shelterassessment\\_may2015.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_npl_factsheet_bhaktapurdistrict_shelterassessment_may2015.pdf)

interest in mothers' groups, they were unable to effectively represent their interests in Ward Citizen Forums

- Although many agency staff spoke of a broad sense of shock and trauma across the affected communities (and most particularly with regards to children), few seemed to have in place a substantive programme of psychosocial counselling or therapy
- Health - in some areas, such as in Dolakha district, over 90% of health posts were destroyed. The government and UN have provided tents from which to operate health posts, however, these are not weathering well and agencies are still waiting on guidelines for temporary shelters for health posts. It is not clear that agencies or the government have allocated resources for temporary health posts
- The sustainable provision of water remains a challenge in some communities, as the earthquake eliminated or re-routed water sources. In Chautara municipality in Sindhupalchowk, BRC with NRCS was trucking in water to fill tanks servicing a temporary camp and hospital. The municipality had been informed of BRC's intent to withdraw this service at the end of August. While everyone was working hard to transition to regular municipal supply, it was unclear whether this would be possible in the time available
- Debris removal is a big concern for people, because of the expense and lack of clarity on how to go about it. This is a particular concern for women-headed households and single women. Some of them do not want to leave IDP camps as they are not sure they will be able to build shelters
- Member teams have some apprehension that those most marginalised may be left out of beneficiary lists due to absence of citizenship cards or registration with local authorities, or because they may not have returned from camps. However, at present there is no systematic data being collected on these cases of exclusion to assess the scale of the problem or to present as evidence.

### **Recommendation one**

**For the recovery, identify and address the needs of those excluded so far from the response, such as unreached VDCs and Wards, those missed off registers, urban renters and the most marginalised in communities, and develop strategies to listen and respond to needs prioritised by people**

## **Innovations**

Most innovations identified were incremental improvements on current practices and include:

- Concerning cash, the diversity of cash transfer modalities, which as well as enveloped distributions included piloting of mobile phone cash transfers using Hello Paisa<sup>11</sup>, using remittance organisations, and HelpAge International's (HAI) and CAFOD's partner CRS/Caritas' partnering with Prabhu Bank respectively
- The use of info-graphics and dashboards to communicate complex information simply, such as used by the IFRC's Surge Information Management Support (SIMS) team. Clusters and OCHA also provide clear and simple information – compared to these organisations this is an area which INGOs have yet to develop
- The use of mobile phone data collection using a variety of platforms including Kobo (Christian Aid), Magpie (BRC) and Mobenzi (Oxfam)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.hellopaisa.com.np/>



- Plan International combined mobile health and education teams, adapted to ensure outreach to the most vulnerable households who may not attend group sessions in the community, and to suit remote, hard-to-reach locations
- Plan International set up a trafficking checkpoint in Dolakha district, given the high incidence of people trafficking in the area
- In Gorkha CAFOD's partner CRS working with Caritas built a shelter demo-site where they have been piloting different building models, with the plan to create more demo sites elsewhere where carpenters, masons and labourers can be trained in safe building techniques
- CAFOD partner CRS/Caritas developed theatre plays addressing issues of trauma and highlighting services available for families needing trauma support. Theatre groups were conducting plays at temporary shelter material distributions, and in surrounding communities in May/June 2015
- BRC used a brightly made up circus clown for attracting awareness about sanitation and hygiene. The clown is popular among school children
- An initiative developed by the Communicating with Communities (CwC) Working Group was to use porters to relay key messages when arriving in remote locations with aid
- NRCS mobilised chapters within Nepal using their alternative communications system that had been set up anticipating loss of telephone communications.

### Humanitarian innovation study key messages

As part of this review, eleven interviews with country directors, innovation and technology specialists, and policy and research staff were undertaken on their perceptions of innovation. Interviews were undertaken mostly by Skype after the visit to Nepal. The findings can be found in Annex Six of this report. The key messages are as follows:

1. the earthquake presented major operational challenges to international and national actors alike, and demanded a number of operational and strategic adaptations to ensure that effective responses could be mobilised
2. the contextual and political barriers to innovation were considerable
3. much of the creativity and novelty present in the response were around tactical adaptations to context
4. many 'visible' and high-profile innovations had no or little connection to the operational setting
5. transformative innovation needs foresight and preparedness to be brought effectively into responses
6. resourcing for innovation, although potentially available, was not targeted enough to allow the mobilisation of a critical mass of innovation effort within the emergency response
7. almost all of the innovation that took place in the response was within specific organisations, with less taking place across organisations
8. insufficient attention was paid by international organisations to the role of local organisations and end-users in innovation
9. innovation needs to be thought about and undertaken in a much more open and democratic fashion than is currently the case.

## Pre-earthquake mitigation and preparedness planning

Overall the response benefited from the extensive preparedness planning efforts undertaken in Nepal over the past few years. Within central government the Central Disaster Relief Committee (CDRC) met two hours after the earthquake with support from the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC). At district level, clusters were activated quickly and early efficiency was achieved through geographical divisions between relief agencies, agreed with the DDRCs and implemented in collaboration with VDCs and ward level citizen forums. Clarity on geographical divisions was intended to ensure extensive coverage of affected areas and to prevent duplication and gaps.

The largest current preparedness initiative in Nepal is the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC), which has been active since 2009 and brings together government, donors, development banks and aid agencies. NRRC operates under four 'flagship' programmes, within which Flagship Two concerns Emergency Preparedness and Response and Flagship Four focuses on Community Based Disaster Risk Management.

For the recovery, an important issue for DEC/HC members and others is to link to pre-disaster capacity strengthening and preparedness actions. Good preparedness includes pre- and post-disaster actions, with a continuation of efforts. To these ends this review recommends that the NRRC 'nine minimum characteristics of a resilient community' - already adopted by NRRC members for the Nepali context - are embraced in recovery actions by DEC/HC members and their partners.

### Recommendation two

Get ready for the next disaster: apply the NRRC Nine Minimum Characteristics of a Resilient Community to recovery activities



### NRRC Characteristics of a Resilient Community<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <http://flagship4.nrrc.org.np/>

As part of preparedness planning, within Districts and municipalities, District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs), Village Disaster Relief Committees (VDRCs) and Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) were constituted. However in the earthquake affected districts, they were not very active: those involved had not had the first-hand experience of dealing with such a large disaster. Many were also personally affected. Nevertheless, many stakeholders appreciated the clarity of these structures and some established understanding of their roles. The most substantive efforts to build earthquake preparedness capacity were targeted at significant destruction in the Kathmandu valley (the scenario agencies such as BRC were preparing for was a 8.0 earthquake in the Kathmandu valley). Preparedness in other places was more for floods, and therefore did not have a significant focus on the districts most affected by the earthquake.

The BRC's earthquake preparedness programme (part of Flagship Four) engaged military and para-military forces in a basic orientation to earthquake rescue and response. These teams eventually played an important role in rescue and relief operations. Also, the BRC's 'Earthquake preparedness for safer communities' project has over the last three years focused on positioning stock, training in first aid, search and rescue and mass communication linked to raising awareness about the earthquake threat. However, the success of the awareness raising element is hard to measure. One key informant considered that while communities are probably better informed, this may not necessarily have led to behaviour change.

District disaster preparedness and response contingency plans were being prepared for flood-prone areas (including stock piling and flood early warning systems). There is an established practice to update the DPRP each year in the 16 flood-prone districts. The ministry of Home Affairs had given INGOs the responsibility to lead the updating of DPRPs.

Several DEC/HC members shared that they were not adequately prepared to respond to a crisis of this scale (the worst since 1934), with rapid depletion of stockpiles (and ensuing delays in procurement and distribution) which affected outreach. Several DEC/HC members were able to draw on support such as relief materials, human resources, and administrative assistance from their counterparts in the region (for example Oxfam's Gorkha operation was initially managed by Oxfam India, while CARE received initial relief materials from CARE India). Right after the earthquake the easy access to Nepal through its open border with India helped. Ironically, it was customs and taxes to import items that were put in place once the government was more fully organised that later caused bottlenecks. A more coherent common voice from donors and agencies might have helped to ease these problems sooner.

Preparedness measures could therefore have been better. In rural areas, key informants mentioned how the focus has been on more regular risks such as flooding and landslides, but had not prepared people for a big earthquake. ActionAid cited an example of one village where children had been playing outside but when the earthquake struck had run back into the house to shelter under their beds. One DEC/HC member mentioned the limited number of CDMCs, but also noted that the government is keen to address this.

Within the Kathmandu valley a number of DEC/HC members and their partners have been engaged in preparedness projects. These include Plan Nepal (schools safety), LWF (disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation), Save the Children (increasing resilience), World Vision (building code implementation) and Oxfam (for example enhancing the health sector and WASH). There may be scope to learn from these experiences to improve preparedness planning in rural areas.

Several INGO key informants noted that there is an opportunity for civil society to work with government to complete the Disaster Management Act, which has been in formulation since 2007 and which is intended to supersede the 1972 Natural Calamity Act. Given the scale of this disaster, there is currently an opportunity for all parts of Nepali society to unite to not only pass the Act, but rather to make this the best Disaster Management Act in the world as one positive outcome from the earthquake.

### **Recommendation three**

**Capitalise on the 'recovery window' to advocate for the passing of a world-leading Disaster Management Act that prioritises equity, inclusion and gender equality, and which stipulates dedicated local level government funds for emergency preparedness**

## **Relevance and reach**

Most DEC/HC agencies already had an established presence in Nepal, even if not in the affected districts, and were able to mobilise a response quickly. However, they were not necessarily present in the 14 earthquake affected districts, and some did not have relationships with district authorities or local NGOs. For example, Concern Worldwide had exited from the country, but had pre-established agreements with a few national NGOs in order to fulfil their humanitarian mandate. They were able to mobilise action quickly. Christian Aid was also not present in the country, but was already involved in a cross border project with Practical Action in Nepal (an operational partner), through which they launched their initial response.

For immediate relief materials, DEC/HC agencies coordinated with district level government and each other for widespread distribution of tarpaulins, basic tools and fixings, tents (in a few areas), and other non-food items such as buckets, jerry cans, health and hygiene kits. A few agencies also distributed food and some seeds. In some areas, particularly urban areas and those affected by landslides, people moved to temporary camps. However, in urban areas, many were eager to return to their homes to salvage materials, and determine their next steps. Those who remain in camps are likely to be those who are especially vulnerable, and it will be important to understand their concerns to ensure that recovery actions are relevant to their needs.

Preparedness efforts largely paid off; clusters were activated quickly and early efficiency was achieved through geographical divisions between relief agencies, agreed with the DDRCs and implemented in collaboration with VDCs and ward level citizen forums. Clarity on geographical divisions was intended to ensure extensive coverage of affected areas and to prevent duplication and gaps. While plans were sound, the terrain and weather presented huge challenges in some areas. Most agencies had not stockpiled the volume of materials for a disaster of this scale; some faced bottlenecks in obtaining materials. Relief distribution was widespread, but varied significantly in timeliness across affected areas, ranging from a few days to over a month after the first earthquake.

### **Targeting and coverage**

Barring the initial distribution of relief materials (tarpaulins and NFI kits), negotiations around targeting have been complicated. The government has tried to play an active - and in some cases, prescriptive - role in the targeting approach, to optimize for scale, and to dispel any

perceptions of inequality (an important principle in Nepali society). Some DEC/HC members have been apprehensive at what they see as the government's 'blanket' approach to cover all those affected, and fear that such unfocused targeting mechanisms may lead to exclusion of some of the most marginalised groups (the impact groups they prioritise) who would not appear on beneficiary lists due to the absence of their names on title deeds, and because many of them do not have citizenship cards.

In addition, in order to comply with blanket targeting, several agencies had to reduce their coverage area after initial relief distribution. It is not clear that these VDCs were then picked up by other agencies. The CDO in Dolakha district indicated that there were significant coverage gaps: of 60 000 affected households, he had a commitment for help to 40 000 households, but only 20 000 had received temporary shelter assistance to date. While the government led response therefore demonstrates a high level of national ownership, some INGOs have been trying to tread a fine line to ensure that those most marginalized (women headed households, widows, Dalits, particular ethnic groups) are not left out, and that beneficiary lists are not politicised. The issue is further complicated by beneficiary lists that change as households divide into family units or those who were not registered attempt to register themselves.

## Cash

Cash programming has been central to much of the response, reflecting the continued rapid uptake of this form of assistance in other recent large scale disasters. For this response there have been three main forms of cash distribution, namely:

**1. Cash transfers** for immediate relief and to help all affected households with temporary shelter. Many communities were offered a choice between CGI or NPR15000. Some communities reported however that the NPR15000 was insufficient to purchase two bundles of CGI, a major factor concerning increased costs of transport to remote areas. Costs also include labour which in some areas has inflated to NPR1000 a day for unskilled labour (the rate is usually around half this amount). Different districts have been carrying out variations; in some places households were reported to have received both NPR15000 and CGI.

Unconditional cash transfers are common. The government stipulated amount of NPR15000 is based on meeting the basic needs of five people for one month. DEC/HC members have been active in cash transfers. HAI provided an unconditional cash grant of NPR7500 to older people and was one of the first to distribute cash. They undertook two forms of cash distribution: one via Prabhu Bank, and a second of direct cash in envelopes. While the bank option was safer with lower risk, it was also slower than direct distribution.

In various community FGDs people spoke positively about cash grants which were invariably used to buy immediately needed goods such as medicines, seeds and shelter-related items. Several key informants noted also that cash was often being used to pay off debts, meaning that in effect households had no immediate benefit from cash distributions.

**2. Cash for work (CFW).** Government guidance on CFW was issued early by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD). Several DEC/HC members have implemented CFW programmes, and where this works well is where the work is meaningful and is usually of communal benefit. One DEC/HC member however combined CFW with temporary house building wherein households receive a CFW payment on completion of their temporary shelter. This contradicts the community benefit idea; for the shelter component it also diminishes household's contribution to recovery, risking an increased sense of dependency, ie households will not act unless paid. Other CFW examples however were proving beneficial. In Dolakha district the local community was involved in



road reconstruction work using CFW. In another example toilet construction materials were provided by the NGOs/INGOs, while community members contributed labour inputs and some construction materials, underscoring both community contribution and local ownership. In Lalitpur, communities worked in teams to clear debris and make roads accessible.

**3. Multi-purpose grants** (unconditional cash transfers). For multi-purpose grants there is an ongoing debate on the targeting strategy. In Gorkha, the district government would like to use the social welfare social protection targeting strategy. At first agencies believed that this may inhibit their ability to reach the most vulnerable (for example, certain Dalit families or ethnic groups) as often these families do not have ID cards and are left out of social protection targeting mechanisms. They have been unable to convince the government on this point, and have since agreed to go along with this proposal, and monitor those excluded and learn from their experience of attempting to connect them into the system. Agencies have agreed to undertake common post distribution monitoring (PDM). Given the importance of cash in this response, it is important that INGOs produce evidence and learning to influence cash strategies to maximise impact, including on those most vulnerable and often excluded.

### **Recommendation four**

**In cash distributions, be mindful of equity within communities and co-ordinate amounts and distribution modalities between agencies.  
Proactively facilitate learning and sharing to establish an evidence-base of what works**

## **Shelter and housing**

Emergency shelter was generally well coordinated and provided life-saving support. There continues to be some coverage gaps in remote locations due to harsh terrain, landslides, and high demand for helicopter services. This includes the 17 districts which were damaged (according to the PDNA) but not enough to warrant their inclusion in the 14 targeted districts.

The shelter cluster offered helpful guidance and clear instruction on what needed to be distributed. The dashboard and document repository on the shelter cluster website<sup>13</sup> provide up-to-date information of the state of play by district, what agencies have done, guidance for agencies involved, as well as lessons from key agencies and past comparable disasters, such as the 2005 Kashmir earthquake.

Tarps and temporary shelter have generally been well-used. People started off under tarps, and as they built temporary shelters, many have reused the emergency materials into these shelters. Similarly, there has been some attention in the fixing of temporary shelter to potentially re-purposing materials at a later stage into permanent homes (for example people avoided cutting the CGI sheets; some used them very conservatively, saving a few sheets for permanent shelter). Other than that there was not much evidence of helping people take a long-term perspective to their shelters, for example building a strong core to extend later.

CGI has been the default material distributed in this response, as in previous disasters. An alternative that is as durable, affordable and transportable as CGI is hard to imagine. The downsides of CGI however should be noted: CGI makes for hot buildings in the summer and cold ones in the winter; they rust and reduce in quality over time. The point to make

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.sheltercluster.org/response/nepal-earthquake-2015>

here therefore is that CGI, in the absence of other approaches is helpful, but it is probably the least worst trade off. Concerning the needed shift to permanent housing, rebuilding should consider traditional approaches such as stabilised rammed earth and use of stone. Several members are encouraging the reuse of materials to rebuild (although care needs to be taken to prevent injury). One DEC/HC member with its partner innovated in designing four temporary show houses made of reused materials. On a visit to one example, the owner attested to having had some 100 visitors over a three week period to see the house. While seemingly well-built, the house however looked rather ramshackle and uninspiring - a simple paint-over of the house would do much to promote what is a good idea. Furthermore, additional skills may be required of builders to understand which materials are good, and which are not.

### **Recommendation five**

**Build the right housing based on listening to people's realities: support traditional building practices that use existing approaches and materials, adhering to seismic standards**

Issues around land rights are likely to emerge for those who do not have adequate documentation for their land, or do not have citizen cards (for example some widows and abandoned women fear they will lose their homes because their names are not on land documents), those who have been relocated because of risks of landslides, etc. Rather than use anecdotes to influence attention toward this, it would be good to engage in a more systematic assessment process to understand what the issues are, and the scale of these issues. This may be an area for joint learning among DEC/HC members, as well as members of the Nepali Association of International NGOs (AIN). As there is apprehension that some deserving households may be marginalised (such as women-headed households, Dalits or particular ethnic groups), this could also be the focus of a collaborative learning effort. The shelter cluster is organising a working group on housing, land and property rights, which presents an opportunity for agencies to pool their information and best thinking to inform.

To assist in rebuilding in remote areas, agencies and others might learn from the experiences following the Pakistan earthquake, wherein 'one-stop shops' were set up, providing technical support and materials. To these ends one DEC/HC member indicated the possibility of a shelter resource centre being set up in Dolakha. There are also significant opportunities to combine livelihoods with house building. Oxfam for instance is looking into supporting the production of alternate building materials (blocks), working with women's groups. They are also exploring at vocational training. Assessments undertaken by CAFOD's partner CRS/Caritas indicate that many women are interested in becoming carpenters and masons. There are also considerable opportunities to train up masons, carpenters and others in skills, not only to provide improved skills, but also to improve job prospects for trained and skilled staff. This is a 'classic' post-disaster response, and is equally valid for this disaster. The recommendation here however is that masons, carpenters and others are trained to a recognised standard, such as that provided by recognised schemes such as the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT). This means that the training means something to employers, and that those who are certified can earn more money in the future, as well as contributing to higher quality buildings.

### **Recommendation six**

**Invest in both safer rebuilding and future livelihoods by training women and men carpenters, plumbers, masons and others using recognised certified schemes such as CTEVT**

## WASH and health

Almost all DEC/HC members mobilised female community health volunteers, in some cases supporting them with additional volunteers focusing on hygiene and health, with a focus on pregnant and lactating women. The intensive focus on WASH, mainstreamed across all members' responses and earlier work in Nepal toward open-defecation free communities, paid off with no major outbreaks of diarrhoea or cholera occurring anywhere.

The issues with water have arisen where the earthquake has caused springs to dry up in some places, while creating new water sources in other areas. In one female FGD, women reported that they now need to walk for an hour to fetch water which is essential both for daily needs and for agriculture which is the main livelihood focus in the community. When asked what they would opt for if given the choice of permanent housing or water, they were quick to say water: 'We need water for everything: to drink, for our crops. We need housing too, but we can't build houses without water'. In this and in another community visited, despite the urgency expressed by inhabitants, nothing was being done to address this by the member agency or NGO partner, raising the issue of agencies' ability to be flexible, and to prioritise community need over what they may be delivering (If the agency lacked the capacity then they could bring in expertise from elsewhere).

## Education

Investing in education is a key element for building sustainability. In the communities visited temporary learning centres (TLCs) have been constructed where schools were destroyed and damaged. In Gampasel, Gorkha, where Save the Children are working, these TLCs are being built alongside government temporary structures that are very rudimentary in appearance, built with wood and CGI. The government structures are divided into very small, cramped classrooms and in contrast the Save the Children TLCs are both roomy and sturdier, built with bamboo and CGI roofing (at the time of being visited this had not yet been completed). The idea is that these TLCs, which can last up to two years, will serve until either a permanent or semi-permanent school replaces it.

Both Save the Children staff and local teachers predicted that the semi-permanent structure was the far more likely option for the future, based on funding available. This structure will not necessarily be built in such a way to enable it to later be converted into a permanent structure, which seems like a missed opportunity.

The teachers also added that the CGI roofing used for both the government and Save the Children TLCs was very hot in the sun and deafening in the rain, making teaching really challenging. The women in Masel said that their children were complaining of headaches and were getting drowsy from the heat in the government TLCs. Save the Children's TLCs, built as they are with bamboo, should present a better option, although the CGI roofing will still result in some heat and noise.

ActionAid has been working with partner CRED for the last four years. CRED's focus is on education. A network of teachers have been used to communicate with the community immediately after the earthquake. They were able to help explain the targeting to community members and help resolve conflicts relating to this. They were effective since they were local, so knew the context and were accepted authority figures. Schools were used as distribution points.

## Gender and gender based violence

DEC/HC members addressed women's needs within rapid needs assessments, and paid good attention to women's needs in the NFI kits, including items of clothing for women and cloth for menstruation management. Members such as Plan, World Vision and CARE partnered with and supported government supported female community health volunteers to deliver health messages and work with pregnant and lactating mothers and other women on their health, hygiene and sanitation practices and needs.

Feedback from women and men was solicited separately following distribution of relief and temporary shelter materials. Concern Worldwide provided transportation support to deliver temporary shelter items to women-headed households and/or older people, while Plan consulted Mothers' groups in planning child friendly spaces and temporary learning centres. While the above suggests a basic level of attention to gender in the immediate response, there seemed however to be less focus and understanding of gender and other social relations in subsequent activities. In one village in several discussions with women it was often stated that they are not being consulted and are not involved in decision making. In one community visited, women reported that no one had talked to them as a group and that they did not know how to provide feedback. They said that the implementing NGO talks to the Ward Coordinator but not to them. There is one woman in the Ward Citizen Forum (WCF) alongside seven men but she says that no one listens to her when she talks and that she is only there to meet the female participation requirement.

Two women's groups exist in most wards - a mother's group and the female health committee. However, there is no systematic interaction between these and the WCF and/or the NGO. In another village, when asked what their priority needs were, women stated they reported needing beds for the monsoon since they are living in temporary shelters and having to sleep on the floor. However, they had not reported this to the WCF since they did not believe they would be listened to. This finding is supported by the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project's first Community Survey referred to earlier (where 73% of women surveyed stated that their problems are being met 'very little' or 'not at all').

In other places when asked, many field teams were unable to comment on gender and other social relations or gender based violence following the earthquake. Some had read news reports of the threat of trafficking but had not noticed these activities in their operational area. While teams suspect that women headed households, Dalits and other marginalised groups may be facing difficulties getting access to relief, they were unable to speak to specifics of the scale of these problems, incidence or risk of gender based violence, problems with ID cards, or women's ability to move out of camps, which are issues being raised strongly by women's groups. Awareness on these issues is not high among these humanitarian teams, and needs to be strengthened - there is already good analysis available for these districts for them to draw on, but they will need some support to build greater confidence and expertise in exploring these issues.

In the next phase DEC/HC members should engage therefore in more systematic monitoring of the experience of marginalised groups, in particular women, women headed households, widows or abandoned women, Dalits, other marginalised groups. Monitoring ideally should be with other agencies to increase efficiency - such as joint PDM (as being proposed by the Cash Working Group) - with findings shared to help other actions, for example feeding information into respective cluster groups and other coordinating bodies. Other independent research should also be used. AIN's plans to convene a working group on protection, inclusion and exclusion may offer an initial sharing and planning platform. Such monitoring and learning efforts could more systematically draw on knowledge of

female community health volunteers, and must also link to local women's rights groups or those offering support to Dalits and other marginalised groups.

CARE and Oxfam carried out rapid gender assessments in a number of districts. The analyses explore gender relations, document women's needs and fears following the earthquake, and make recommendation for a gender sensitive response in SRMH, food security, WASH, shelter and gender based violence. They serve as a powerful resource for all actors in this space and need to be used to build awareness and capacity, and to inform recovery activities. Similar resources are being produced by OCHA and the protection cluster. In another example of good practice, Oxfam partnered with Women for Human Rights (WHR), a national NGO, to build women's centres in six earthquake affected districts that offer women counselling and referral services. They help women who have lost their citizenship cards to register for earthquake ID cards.

## Inclusion

An important element in shaping the earthquake response has been the blanket approach to targeting stipulated by government and the resulting different interpretations of this approach at various levels of government and among NGOs. One key informant highlighted how the post-conflict environment in Nepal is a big influencing factor in the way the response is being handled. The attitude and push for a blanket approach is very much linked to this, with the government eager to appear neutral and impartial in this response, ie. 'if you can't do it for everyone, then you can't do it for anyone'.

Agencies for the most part used beneficiary selection lists that were compiled at the Ward level by the WCFs and VDCs based on citizenship cards and registration with local authorities. Many actors were quick to point out that particular groups had been excluded from beneficiary lists, in particular ethnic groups who are frequently marginalised. In one FGD held with women in Gorkha it was reported that one very poor household (parents and four children) were not included on the beneficiary list and therefore did not receive NPR15 000, despite damages to their house, since they were not considered to be citizens. Several key informants also noted that those in less affected districts bordering the targeted districts were not receiving support, despite often being just as affected as their neighbours.

Several DEC/HC members with partners subsequently carried out household verification to ensure that people are not being missed and in cases where households have been missed have advocated for their names to be added to the list. However, where the government does not consider a household to hold citizenship this can be problematic. This is an area where INGOs and NGOs need to work together to present their evidence and scale of the problem, and address this issue with the government.

While agencies are right to work closely with government and make use of existing structures rather than create parallel committees, it is vital that consultation extends beyond these official channels to ensure the response reflects and responds to the needs of all those affected. To this end, ActionAid is engaging with women's rights and youth mobilisation groups. They are very keen for this disaster response to be used as an opportunity to transform society from both an economic and social perspective, particularly where gender is concerned. Oxfam has gender officers in six districts focusing on inclusion and mainstreaming. Other key informants have also spoken of this disaster as an opportunity for societal change for greater social equity. Older people are also frequently among the most marginalised. HAI partner HelpAge is advocating at the cluster level for the inclusion of older people in response programmes and thanks to this work now feel there is more recognition among the government and NGO community of older peoples' specific needs.



# Coordination

Many of those interviewed stated that coordination could be better. More coordination would help in cash-programming for example, given the different range of distribution modalities and varying amounts. High turnover of staff, both at the UN and INGO level, has been raised as a factor hindering effective coordination. The Cash Working Group has raised the issue of getting timely feedback on technical issues as agency staff participation is irregular; technical staff are too often on very short-term contracts (two to six weeks), and are for the most part focused on their own agencies' deliverables which can undermine coordination initiatives, which can be time consuming. As a way to mitigate this, the Cash Working Group formed the Core Group, composed of a smaller number of agencies that were able to lead in this area.

The focus on agency specific deliverables as opposed to wider interest is a common concern; as one key informant stated, 'We need more synergy among ourselves ... (and) think more of the collective impact more than individual performance'. There are initiatives in development, led by the Cash Working Group that DEC/HC members could benefit in joining in such as conducting joint PDM; there would be clear benefits to conduct these jointly and have one report for learning purposes and for developing joint analysis to promote greater effectiveness, rather than learning remaining at the individual agency level. AIN is also convening working groups on Permanent shelter; Protection, Inclusion and Exclusion; and Food Security and Livelihoods.

In Gorkha district DEC/HC members and partner NGOs reported high levels of effective co operation, although in some areas initially there was a lot of competition between INGOs to work in particular areas, with agencies 'booking' disaster affected areas to carry out their responses. Coordination at this time involved organisations informing each other where they were working.

The following recommendation builds on and goes beyond the positive experiences in Gorkha, applying it to other districts and at national level. It implies a strong focus on collaborative learning, analysis, and evidence building as a core role for INGOs, particularly on issues that transcend technical cluster categories. The recommendation suggests working through the existing AIN<sup>14</sup> which has a long-standing presence in Nepal.

## Recommendation seven

**Ensure an INGO collective voice in representing common issues to government and other stakeholders, making use of established networks such as AIN**

## Coordination with the government

DEC/HC members worked closely with government at district level authorities, VDCs and Ward Citizen's Forums and with the clusters, although again staff turnover and high workload hinders affective coordination. As noted earlier, there are variances in the way that different districts interpret central policies, which leads to INGO having to adapt their approach in each district. There was little evidence found in this review of members collaborating with the private sector, although there was acknowledgement of their inputs. Staff from some DEC/HC members indicated that the private actors they encountered did

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ain.org.np/>

not have the appetite to engage in the cluster coordination mechanism. This is something that should be explored within future preparedness actions.

Gorkha District was the epicentre of the earthquake and was the hardest hit district with 8000 deaths and 45 000 people injured. Here, as elsewhere, the government has taken a strong lead in the response, with decisive strategies on targeting and aid distribution, making it clear that households where homes were damaged or destroyed should receive either CGI or cash but not both. This clarity and coordination has enabled agencies to move ahead fast, with distributions almost finished.

As per the 2013 National Disaster Framework there are various structures proposed at national, regional and the local level to respond to the national calamity. The District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) chaired by the CDO is the main coordinating body at the local level which seem to be functional in most cases. The 'Local Self Governance Act – 1999' promotes the concept of decentralizing disaster risk management and encourages the district authorities to address the issues primarily at the district and VDC/municipality levels. INGOs and NGOs appear to be coordinating closely with the DDRC and VDCs in terms of prioritising the relief distribution.

## Clusters

Across the board there has been generally high appreciation for the functioning of the clusters as coordination and technical guidance bodies. The shelter cluster for example comprises well over 100 members and is convened by the IFRC and the DUDBC. Within the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) there are 11 INGOs as well as governmental representatives; there is also a coordination support group comprising donors and others. There are also Technical Working Groups (TWiGs). At the time of writing a recovery and reconstruction working group is about to commence, as well as a working group on housing, land and property (HLP) rights.

While clusters have been largely effective, several stakeholders have noted challenges in enacting cross-sectoral themes, such as cash and gender. The sectoral focus of the cluster model is both its strength and weakness: while co-ordination and information sharing within clusters has worked reasonably well at village and district level, and local NGOs were generally engaged, the mechanisms to ensure coordination across clusters has not been as effective. This poses a risk to attempts to build a more integrated approach to the recovery and reconstruction phases.

When the clusters stop functioning (most have end dates between September and December 2015), there is widespread concern about what will replace them. In part, this depends on what kind of community level infrastructure the Government's newly-established NRA will link to. Nevertheless, as the clusters wind down their work it will be important for agencies to support institutionalised structures to take this work forward. This means closely engaging with bodies such as NRRC, AIN, and the Disaster Preparedness Network Nepal (DPNET, which has both INGO and NGOs represented) at national level, as well as DDCs, VDCs, Ward Citizen Forums and local groups and networks promoting the interests of marginalised groups. In addition to these platforms, there are other thematic networks such as the national network for total sanitation that have coordination mechanisms down to community level. It would be useful to map these platforms and forums to ensure sustained support and coordination through the recovery period.

## Partnerships with local NGOs

The government of Nepal requires international NGOs to implement their programmes through national (registered at central level) and local (registered in districts) NGOs. The entire response of DEC/HC members is through these organisations. The partnership modalities used by agencies for the emergency relief phase on the whole demonstrates adaptiveness and flexibility. In some cases, where agencies were new to districts, in order to prevent administrative delays in searching for new partners, DEC/HC members brought with them national NGOs or local NGOs from other districts with which they had existing relationships (for example Plan and Sahmati). In others, they searched for new partners or worked with national NGOs. In some places, local NGOs were severely affected by the earthquake, even losing access to their offices (as noted in Sindhupalchowk in conversation with one DEC/HC member), with several of their staff having to take time off to attend to personal crisis. It was a challenge for DEC/HC members new to affected districts to find partners with the required capacities to organise relief distribution in a short period of time at the scale required. Whatever the modality used therefore, most organisations involved have had their capacities stretched.

The majority of DEC/HC members were already present in Nepal and had pre-established relationships with partners. On the plus side, a lot of work on preparedness had taken place (although this has focused mostly on flooding and not earthquake in the affected areas), and clear advantages of this were that people were on the ground and ready to scale up, links had been established between the government, and various partners and some goods had been prepositioned.

Tearfund's partner NGO Rado promotes an approach wherein INGOs need to focus on empowerment - INGOs therefore should have policies in place to ensure a rights based approach, and that they empower the partners with whom they work. They believe this approach will then have the knock on effect of empowering local communities. There is a current danger of creating dependency, which is a big challenge that needs to be addressed to avoid it becoming a culture. According to Rado, the principal role they see INGOs playing is in skills provision. They also believe local NGOs can give insight to INGOs on ways to improve the way they work.

Across the board DEC/HC members can do more to work with and through NGO counterparts. While many of the members visited demonstrate strong partner NGO links (such as Christian Aid, IRW's work with LWF, Oxfam, CARE, Plan and Concern Worldwide), in several of the visits for this review, several members made no reference at all of partners until asked, giving the wrong impression that the INGO was the sole implementer (this should also be noted in marketing materials and agency website updates - non-acknowledgement of the efforts of a partner by an INGO does little to build trust).

Many local NGOs have also been on a very steep learning curve since the earthquake, and would benefit from more support. Some are undertaking tasks they are ill-equipped to perform, for instance in shelter, where for some, activities do not go beyond distribution (one INGO stated that to counter this they had provided specialist support in the form of one shelter specialist, but with so many villages in far-flung and hard to access places, this support is probably insufficient). One NGO staff member stated that her organisation was undertaking psycho-social programming, however on probing this meant saying little more than telling communities that 'all would be fine'. Good programme monitoring with investments in support to national NGOs is therefore needed, not only to improve the quality of the recovery, but also, crucially, to invest in long term improved capacity within Nepali civil society.

Concerning recovery actions it would now be timely to re-examine these relations. Many local NGOs in these districts did recover quickly, but remain disconnected from the cluster coordination mechanisms that are largely controlled by INGOs. Also, many of them struggle to obtain resources to engage in activities (NGOs are almost completely reliant on INGOs for funds). There have been some complaints from local NGOs, both about being left out of relief efforts as well as being side-lined by INGOs and NGOs from other districts in wards and VDCs where they have had a longstanding presence. While communities should not be seen as the ‘turf’ of any particular development organisations, for the recovery it will be useful to involve local and community organisations in implementation and learning roles and with a strong capacity strengthening focus, particularly reaching out to those with strong connections to women and other marginalised groups. In this regard, and considering the expectation where only partners can be operational, INGOs have a duty to strengthen national and local NGOs as much as possible. For this review the following recommendation is that this can be achieved through the better sharing of power in strategic decision-making and collaborative learning.

### **Recommendation eight**

To contribute better to national and local NGO capacity, recovery plans must be jointly developed with NGO partners, wherein these partners have an equal stake in strategy, direction and final sign off

## **Communication with disaster affected communities**

With so many international and local actors it is of little surprise that messages are sometimes confusing and contradictory. Several key informants pointed to the need to prevent rumours and false information, one example being differing amounts of cash grants that might be available. Issues include: communities receiving conflicting and confusing messages from different organisations; remote communities having to send delegations in order to communicate their needs to the authorities; and different languages, of which there are some 125 in Nepal.

There are several active initiatives aimed at improving communications. The Communicating with Communities (CwC) Working Group<sup>15</sup> is seeking to understand better how communities prefer to receive information, and to capture and share community feedback in a consistent way. CwC was established four days after the earthquake by UNICEF with support from OCHA with the objective of agreeing messages across the clusters and coordination with partners on common materials. OCHA’s Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project<sup>16</sup> has been set up. Concerning rumours the project Open Mic Nepal<sup>17</sup> is tracking community level rumours and presents findings for agency use.

Many organisations however are focusing on individual communication efforts, which has resulted in ‘a confusing bombardment of messages’. Rather than this being due to a dearth of information, CwC believes this is due to communities receiving information that does not

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal/cwc-working-group>

<sup>16</sup> <http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/inter-agency-common-feedback-project-nepal-earthquake-2015>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.internews.org/our-stories/project-updates/open-mic-nepal>

resonate with them (the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project's first Community Survey found that the information respondents mostly need concerns government decisions and how to get shelter materials) .

Agencies also need to work harder at hearing communities. In the words of one expert key informant, 'Now we need to listen to people, and not only focus on how we communicate with them. It is really important that communication strategies are based on what people are telling us they want and need'. One example here is provided by World Vision and its partner who adapted their communication modalities after receiving community feedback by stopping the use of SMS messaging which was excluding older people. For the recovery there needs to be more of this within members' operations. In the words of one CwC key informant, 'After the quake it was all about providing communications. It's now the time to listen; the feedback from the community should inform what we do next'.

In other instances there have been good examples of localised messaging, for example Oxfam's radio messaging with its partner Radio Sindhu in Sindhupalchowk in the local language. Other examples include Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART) playing radio messages over megaphones in remote areas where there was no radio coverage; UNICEF providing 10 000 copies of educational materials to NGOs to give out in their distributions and also making use of at scale-procurement of 5 000 radios and making these available for NGOs to distribute. NRCS also developed games and simple information on earthquake preparedness<sup>18</sup>.

The use of community communications concerning WASH may provide useful lessons. The number of signboards in many affected districts indicating defecation free zones demonstrated the attention to sanitation pre-earthquake. WASH interventions have been widespread, promoted by most agencies, and a range of creative good practice in communication to draw on in hygiene and sanitation education. Plan and BRC for example are working closely with the government's Female Community Health Volunteers to promote health, hygiene and sanitation messages, with some agencies supplementing their efforts with additional volunteers, while Christian Aid uses song to convey messages and BRC is using radio messaging and a clown who visits schools and communities.

Agencies reported using mostly conventional mechanisms when communicating with communities, such as community meetings, transparency boards, banners, complaints boxes, community mobilisers, helpdesks and complaints desks. Visibility tools such as logos, t-shirts and banners were also cited as a simple way of an agency communicating who they are. CARE has created 'Complaints Corners' which they set up when carrying out distributions. They find that in doing this they are able to resolve 50% of complaints on the spot, as many are related to explaining beneficiary selection. However, they ensure staff are aware when a complaint may be sensitive and requires referral. Concern Worldwide and World Vision have staffed positions focused on accountability. This person sets up a feedback desk at distribution sites, and proactively seeks feedback from a sample of beneficiaries, and is able to offer clarifications, if needed. NRCS also uses distributions as an entry point for feedback, setting up helpdesks when distributions are taking place.

Oxfam found that a good entry point for two-way communication has been achieved by integrating a couple of questions into its PDM asking for feedback including comments on staff conduct. So far this has been rolled out in a few districts. In Dhading in particular this has led to an influx of feedback on the seed distributed there. As one key informant noted, 'we've received several serious allegations that are sensitive that we have been able to respond to. In the two districts where we have done a lot (responded), it has been a real eye opener'. One DEC/HC member describes communication with communities as patchy

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.beprepared.nrrc.org.np/organization/nepal-red-cross-society>



at present. It works well where there is a strong presence of organised volunteers and where the ward is also organised well.

A hotline was set up by the government within the first week following the earthquake and they were reportedly receiving thousands of calls each day. The hotline supposedly then referred people to the district level, but it is not known what happened in terms of follow up/response. Attempts were made to log the calls; however of the 25 000 or so calls received in the first week, only around 700 were logged. CwC tried to link with the hotline but this offer was declined by government.

One DEC/HC member with its partner created a telephone hotline. The hotline was publicised using calling cards, details on distributed items and through demonstrations with communities on how to use the number. Take up however has been low. One reason given as possible explanation relates to ethnic groups where mistrust and ingrained marginalisation acts as a barrier, for example fear that the person answering the call will discriminate based on caste. In village FGDs community members stated that they would communicate complaints and get information directly from the Ward Citizen Forum representatives or through the local NGOs directly.

## Radio

Community radio has a vast network in Nepal and some DEC/HC members have taken advantage of this to share information. Oxfam broadcasts health messages with its partner Radio Sindhu over the radio, which includes the hotline number. This radio message is broadcast throughout Sindhupalchowk in the local language. The requests reaching Oxfam via the hotline are consistently about getting information on targeting and selection. The encouraging finding is that people seem to be aware of Oxfam's vulnerability criteria and frequently challenge them on it when they call. One plan for moving forward with the validation of beneficiary lists is to share the process with the community and get their buy in.

Radio and other media have also been used to appeal to responders to include marginalised groups in their responses as well as communicating messages relating to GBV and referral systems. The government also used radio to communicate key messages. So far these types of activities have all taken place on an individual agency level with no known attempts at joint mechanisms. However, Care, Plan and World Vision are commissioning a sociologist to carry out an evaluation of feedback and information-sharing mechanisms leading to a strategy that can be rolled out across 10 districts.

The following recommendation therefore concerns better and clearer two-way communication. Importantly however it adds a monitoring indicator wherein agencies could monitor, as a measure of how well they are listening, the impact of community feedback on changes in programming.

### **Recommendation nine**

**Work collaboratively to improve two-way communication with communities to counter rumour, maintain clear and consistent messaging and to share feedback and analysis useful to agencies, coordinating bodies and government. To ensure INGOs are listening to people, monitor and report on how programmes have adapted as a result of community feedback**

## Mobile data collection and information management

A number of DEC/HC members and national NGO partners are using mobile data collection using a variety of platforms. Mobile data collection among other things can lead to swifter programme changes, through for instance decision-makers being able to see survey information as soon as it has been gathered. BRC with NRCS use Magpie, a custom made tool for data collection which is used globally and was used in Nepal as part of the preparedness project. NRCS collects data from each district in a number of ways so the aim is to support them in creating templates for them to fill in and send back. There is a wealth of data which needs to be used to identify gaps and see where improvements can be made.

The use however of digital data gathering comes with a caveat - the wrong impression can easily be projected by staff entering a community with smartphones on show. As one community member reportedly said, 'Don't come here with your fancy cell phones when all you need to do is tell me why I'm not on the list!' technology should not also become a barrier to building relations: as a key informant noted, 'Technology is great, but at the first phase of a response you need more time to build a rapport with communities to build trust.'

Concerning information management, use of info-graphics, mapping, sifting and analysing information to present in simple ways is growing rapidly. BRC's Surge Information Management Support (SIMS), an IFRC initiative, was activated several hours after the earthquake and within a day had produced a number of high quality maps. Use of graphics and consideration of communication can serve to rapidly improve efficiency through clearer understanding, and increase effectiveness by pushing for clarity of findings or prioritisation of messages emerging from complex analysis. In the words of one SIMS key informant, who pointing to a map said, 'this is the same as 99 000 lines of Excel!' Such information is now readily available via a number of dashboards, one of which that is particularly useful is the Nepal survey of surveys<sup>19</sup>. Another is the Humanitarian Data Exchange<sup>20</sup>, launched in July 2014. The Government of Nepal's Disaster Risk Reduction Portal<sup>21</sup> also provides clear and usable information. And while some DEC/HC members in management referred to such innovations, too many appeared to be unaware of the benefits and usefulness of such information. Given the rapidly evolving nature of information management, all agencies would do well to become more up to date with such changes.

While these tools can go a long way in promoting effective communication between agencies, the recommendation below is also about making the commitment to (and space for) collaborative learning and generation of evidence to influence decision making for a high impact recovery program.

### Recommendation ten

To improve efficiency and effectiveness, invest in significantly improving communication between agencies, within clusters and to government making use of available and emerging digital tools.

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<sup>19</sup> [Nepalassessments.github.io](https://nepalassessments.github.io)

<sup>20</sup> <https://data.hdx.rwlab.org/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://drrportal.gov.np/>

# Annexes

## 1. Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) nine commitments



## 2. Timetable of activities

When	Where	Who	Activities
2/8	Both teams	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Security orientation</li> <li>Inception meeting with 35 staff from DEC/HC members: introductions, small group 'world café' consultations on each of the four terms of reference main areas of enquiry, closing discussion</li> </ul>
3/8	Kathmandu	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) head office meeting, meeting with IRW and Lutheran World Federation (LWF): Muhammad Sharig, Programme Manager, IRW, Syed Mudassar Shah, Head of Mission (interim), IRW, Prabin Manandhar, Country Director, LWF and Govinda Raval, Emergency Response Programme Co ordinator, LWF</li> <li>Action Aid head office meeting: Paras Mani Tamang, Humanitarian Response Director, William Morgan, Philanthropy and Partnerships and Raj Kumar Trikmatri, Emergency Response Manager</li> </ul>
	Sindhupal-chowk	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with 5 BRC staff: Ben Moon, Nazer Rehaman, Sushma Shrestha-Hygiene Protection, Sudeep Khatri and Shree Krishna Poudel</li> </ul>
4/8	Kathmandu, Machigaun and Thankot	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HelpAge International, meeting with head office, 11 men, 9 women</li> <li>Community meeting of older people, Machigaun, 10 men, 7 women</li> <li>Community meeting of older people, Thankot, 15 women (three of which government officials), 6 men</li> <li>Meeting with VDC chief, Thankot</li> </ul>
	Sindhupal-chowk	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with 7 World Vision staff members: J B Bohara, District Coordinator, Sirish Singh, Logistics Officer, Kudhabe Tamang, Justine, Sarina Maharjan, Accountability Officer, Janahit Sewa Muncha, Rup Kumar B K, Ek Raj Subedi and Krishna Poudel,</li> <li>1 X District Survey Office, Sharad Chandra Mainali, Survey Officer</li> </ul>
5/8	Makwarpur District	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tearfund, meeting with Rajan Ghimire, Nepal Response Manager</li> <li>Liti community meeting, Tistung VDC, Ward no. 9</li> <li>Ward citizens' forum FGD, 10 men, 10 women</li> <li>UDC meeting, 4 men, 2 from RADO (local partner)</li> <li>Meeting with Rado chairman</li> <li>Meeting with James Shepherd-Baron, DFID</li> </ul>
	Dolakha	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with 6 Plan staff members: Ninh Nyugen – Field Emergency Response Manager, Chandra Kayastha- Area Manager, Vikash Sharma – Project Manager (Health and Cash), Nagendra – Sahamati, Kripa Shrestha – Health, Laxmi Dahal – Wash, Dibash – Life line and Kush Thapa (Distribution Coordinator)</li> <li>Demo site Moude, FGD with cash for work community members (14), also Health workers (Government)</li> <li>Community interaction at Lakule danda, Suspa and Sulkamin</li> </ul>
6/8	Kathmandu	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>British Red Cross, meetings with head of operations, Marga Ledo cash transfer and livelihoods officer, Kenny Hamilton, recovery co ordinator, Paul Knight, SIMS, Mark South, Beneficiary Communications</li> </ul>
	Dolakha	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern Worldwide team meeting with Saroj Dash, Concern Worldwide, Alastair Taylor, Concern World Wide, Sugandha Gurung, Concern Worldwide, Ratna Karki, Team Leader, RRN, Wisdom Pandey, Logistics Officer, RRN and Medina Poudel, Coordinator, RRN</li> <li>Field visit – Bhirkot and Japhe (HH visit at Majhi gaon, Warehouse visit, community interaction)</li> <li>Meeting with Japhe VDC: Sudeep Thapa, Teacher, Tirtha Ghimire, VDC Secretary, Jhaphe, Prem Khatri, VDC Secretary, Bhirkot, Yagya B Karki, Ward Citizen Forum, Deepak Karki, Ward Citizen Forum, Badri B Khadka, School Management Committee, Shyam Kaji Khatiwada, Cooperative, Ramji Khadka, Congress, Gyanendra Raj K C, UML, Raju K C, Maoist, Aurab B Karki, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Sita Ram Upreti,</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maoists and Basanta Thapa, UML</li> <li>Meeting with District Development Office (DDC: Devendra Lamichane, Chief District Officer, Chandra Dangal, Shelter Coordinator</li> </ul>
7/8	Kathmandu, Kavre	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action Aid partner NGO Educational Model Rural Development Centre FGD, 5 men, 6 women, Chairman and 5 AA staff</li> </ul>
		Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oxfam meetings - Leo Roozendaal, Nadia Khalid, Destelia Ngwenya, Lisa Biblo, Kate Heath, Shree Bhakta Basnet, Cecilia Keizer, Jack Frith-Powell, Prasad Bhagwan Sevekari, Bandana Shrestha, Nutan Pokharel, Puspa Bhusal, Neelam Parajuli and Karuna Amatya</li> <li>Project visit in Lubhu and Lamatar of Lalitpur districts – 4 ENPHO staff, community members, men and women working</li> </ul>
8/8		Both teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Morning meeting to review findings, identify gaps, discuss possible recommendations and confirm week two plans</li> <li>Afternoon free</li> </ul>
9/8	Gorkha	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group meeting with 18 staff from Christian Aid, CARE and CRS/Caritas</li> <li>CARE village meeting, 30 men, 25 women, also 2 from SSICDC (local partner) and 2 VDC members</li> </ul>
	Gorkha	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CRS/Caritas, Bungkot VDC meeting: Cash for shelter beneficiaries – Kaili Maya Pariyar, Hasta kumari Gurung, Chair of Ward and other community members</li> <li>Visit to CRS/Caritas Demo site, meeting with Davor Dakovic, Program lead for Gorkha, Vera Krevwells, Shelter Advisor, Danu Darai, Meal Officer, Ramesh Tripathi, Logistics Officer, Minar Thapa Magar, Shelter Engineer Consultant, Rajesh Sunuwar, WASH engineer consultant, Mani Gurung, Volunteer and Sujun Khatri, Volunteer</li> </ul>
10/8	Gorkha	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with VDC Secretary and members, Ashrang, Gorkha</li> <li>13 men, 2 women; also 2 CA staff, 2 PA staff</li> <li>Village health meeting, 7 women</li> <li>PGVS community meeting (CA partner), 4 women, 11 men; 2 CA staff, 2 PGVS staff</li> <li>Meeting with CDO and 25 INGO and UN representatives</li> </ul>
	Gorkha	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Save the Children, Gampasel, meeting with staff and partner, Swara Saghan Integrated Community Development Centre. Meeting with Jeremiah Kariuki – Deputy Regional Manager, Prajwol Khatiwada-Education Coordinator, Elawati K.C. – WASH Coordinator, Manoj Baral – WASH Engineering Officer, Sumina Subba – Media and Communication Officer, Ishor Ghimire – District Manager, Dip Narayan Joshi – Project Coordinator (Partner NGO - SSICDC), Nabin Tiwari-Shelter Coordinator of SCI and Raj Bahadur Buda- Education Technical Officer of Partner NGO (SSICDC)</li> <li>Field visits – Gampasel VDC and to TLC</li> <li>FGD with 16 women and separate FGD with men</li> </ul>
11/8	Kathmandu	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return from Gorkha to Kathmandu</li> <li>Meeting with Nepal Red Cross leadership – SG Mr Dev Ratna Dhakwa, Director of DM Mr Dharma Raj Pandey and Mr Umesh Prasad Dhakal, Head of Earthquake Response Operations; also NRCS Chairman and Secretary General</li> <li>Meeting with Maggie Stephenson, Shelter Cluster</li> </ul>
		Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Return from Gorkha to Kathmandu</li> </ul>
12/8	Kathmandu	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Victoria Bannan, Shelter Cluster Coordinator</li> <li>Attendance at Shelter Cluster partners' meeting focusing on cash</li> <li>Meeting with MoFALD: Under-Secretary (Mr Rishi Acharya), Joint Secretary and additional officials</li> <li>Meeting with Maya Kapsokavadi, IFRC NRRC Flagship 4</li> <li>Meeting with UN-HABITAT: Bruno Dercan, Senior Human Settlements</li> </ul>

			Officer, Padma Sunder Joshi, Nepal Programme Manager
	Kathmandu	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Giovanni Congi, Project Manager for the Inter Agency Common Feedback Project; Bronwyn Russel, Humanitarian Affairs Officer for the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project</li> <li>Meeting with Oxfam MEAL coordinator Destelia Ngwenya; and Karuna Amatya</li> </ul>
13/8	Kathmandu	Team 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Nicola Murray, DFID</li> <li>Meeting with Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC)</li> <li>Meeting with NSET: Amod Mani Dixit, Executive Director, Surya Acharya, Director, SESP NSET, Surya Narayan Shrestha, Deputy Executive Director</li> </ul>
	Kathmandu	Team 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telephone Conversation with Women for Human Rights, Founder President, Lily Thapa</li> <li>Meeting with NGO Federation of Nepal, Secretary General (Gopal Lamsal) and Executive Director (Daya Sagar Shrestha)</li> <li>Meeting with AIN Chair, David Smith, Country Director of Dan Church Aid and AIN Steering Committee Member responsible for Disaster Management</li> <li>Meeting with UN OCHA Leszek Barczak, Public Information Office, Marianne Vik, Technical Adviser, Rachel Routley, incoming Coordinator</li> </ul>
14/8	Kathmandu	Both teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close out meeting with 40 DEC/HC members and IFRC staff to present and test recommendations – introductions, presentation of 10 recommendations and discussion, small group exercise discussing application of each recommendation over next 2-3 years</li> </ul>



### 3. Key informant interview questions

#### DEC/HC Nepal earthquake appeal response review, August 2015

- For DEC/HC personnel, government officials and others
- Each question is an invitation for the interviewee to elaborate with examples
- Choose which questions to ask: not all questions will be relevant to all interviewees
- Disaggregate questions by gender where applicable

#### Gaps, priority areas and unmet needs

1. What are the **priority issues** right now? How have these changed over time?
2. What are the key **unmet needs and challenges** right now? What can be done to address these?
3. Please give examples of **innovations and/or exemplary programming** (such as use of cash or shelter) that were tried. What worked, what didn't and what challenges did you encounter in the process?
4. What impact did **preparedness and mitigation planning** before the earthquake have on the disaster?
5. What **capacities** have been strengthened/ built during the initial response? What capacity gaps remain?

#### Relevance and reach (including DAC criteria)

6. How **efficient** has the response been (eg co ordination, clusters, use of resources)? Examples?
7. How **effective** has the response been? Examples?
8. How **relevant** have actions been? Examples? (Probe on how shifting needs were taken into account)
9. **Sustainability**: how are relief interventions linking to rehabilitation and development? Examples?
10. How were **the most vulnerable** identified (eg assessment approaches) and how were/ are they reached? Examples?
11. Which **shelter** approaches work best? Which have not? Why?
12. How is **gender based violence** (GBV) and vulnerability addressed? Examples?

#### Coordination

13. How well have DEC/HC members' actions supported the **government's response**? Examples? What are the challenges?
14. How well have DEC/HC members worked with **local actors**, eg civil society, private sector, army? Examples? What are the challenges?
15. How well have DEC/HC members worked with **other INGOs and UN bodies**?
16. How has the **Core Humanitarian Standard** (CHS) been used? Examples?

#### Communication with disaster affected communities

17. To what extent and how are the views of **crisis-affected people** sought and used to guide programme design and implementation? Examples?
18. What special efforts have been made to consult with women and the most marginalised (eg .caste differences)? Examples?
19. What communication approaches were used? Which have been the best?

#### Anything we have missed you would like to tell us about?

# Community focus group questions

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DEC/HC Nepal earthquake appeal response review, August 2015

- 'NGO' refers to the respective DEC/HC member(s) active in this community
- Each question is an *invitation* for community members to elaborate with examples
- Disaggregate questions *by gender* if in gender-mixed groups

## Gaps, priority areas and unmet needs

1. How well are you recovering?
2. What are your key unmet needs right now? How have these changed over time?
3. Was anything being done to prepare for the earthquake before it happened that you know of?

## Relevance and reach (including DAC criteria)

4. How well has the NGO helped you? Did they provide what you needed? Any examples? Who else offered useful assistance
5. How will the NGO's work help you to recover in the long term? Why?
6. Did the NGO ask you what you needed? How?
7. How were the most vulnerable in your community helped?
8. What should the NGO do better next time?

## Coordination

9. How well did the NGO work with others, eg government, local NGOs or community groups? Any examples?

## Communication with disaster affected communities?

10. How often have you seen the NGO? What happened when you met?
11. Do you have examples of the NGO responding to your direct requests?
12. How has the NGO communicated with you?
13. How has anyone else communicated with you, eg from government?

## Anything we have missed you would like to tell us about?

## 4. Testing the recommendations: identifying three key actions over the next two to three years

As part of the final day presentation and discussion of the ten recommendations, participants were invited to choose one recommendation and work together to identify three key actions to enact over the next two to three years. Responses were typed verbatim as groups presented their three key actions, which are as follows.

### 1. For the recovery, identify and address the needs of those excluded so far from the response, such as unreached VDCs and wards, those missed off registers, urban renters and the most marginalised in communities, and develop strategies to listen and respond to needs prioritised by people

- In order to address the needs of those excluded, **work with the government endorsed forums such as community user groups, and help make them more inclusive** (long term effort)
- **Develop clarity on who the excluded and marginalised groups are** so that interventions can be tailored and responsive to their needs. The most marginalised people are often seen as passive, dependent people. Enhance their capacities and build on their resources
- **Give suitable training according to needs and local contexts** – training on masonry, etc. At the same time also take into account the gender factor... Keep in mind the needs of women when they attend these trainings.

### 2. Get ready for the next disaster: apply the NRRC Nine Minimum Characteristics of a Resilient Community to recovery activities

- Work on creating **awareness among communities, VDCs, district and national level that the nine minimum characteristics of a resilient community exist to incorporate into development action plans**
- **Develop innovations around each of these characteristics** – work at community, ward, VDC level to surface these
- **Monitor integration of these characteristics** – one year after, three years after, etc to make sure they don't slip.

### 3. Capitalise on the 'recovery window' to advocate for the passing of a world-leading Disaster Management Act that prioritises equity, inclusion and gender equality, and which stipulates dedicated local level government funds for emergency preparedness

- **Advocate for enactment of this act** using top-level negotiation with policy makers or social movements
- Advocate for an act that has provision for developing **private-public partnerships** and the possibility to develop insurance facilities
- Advocate for national budget allocation to **build a fund to use for disaster response**, rather than waiting for emergency appeals
- Within disaster management act... there should be **provisions for focused targeting** that takes into consideration the proportionate impact that disasters have on different social groups, e.g. the poor, marginalised, children, tribes, different ethnic groups. If this is in the act, it will be easier to guide new actors coming in.

4. In cash distributions, be mindful of equity within communities and co-ordinate amounts and distribution modalities between agencies. Proactively facilitate learning and sharing to establish an evidence-base of what works

- Have an **interagency collaborative assessment system** focused on **cash** (including learning about its utilisation) - agree to common set of questions (core) for at least 14-15 districts (harmonisation of formats – AKVO, KOBO, etc). Assess the impact of conditional and unconditional transfers were good: how relevant were they for different people's needs?
- There should be long term coordination on cash; It will be used in different forms through the recovery period. There should be **ongoing mechanism of coordination** that goes hand in hand with the use of cash (this also helps with preparedness)
- If there are people who are at times sceptical, why is it their responsibility to contest with evidence? If cash is being promoted, then **those using cash strategies should produce evidence of its value.**

5. Build the right housing based on listening to people's realities: support traditional building practices that use existing approaches and materials, adhering to seismic standards

- Humanitarian actors don't have knowledge of traditional practices and how they vary in different areas. The **shelter cluster can gather these practices through a mapping of traditional building practices with ways to adapt them to be seismic proof**
- Organisations should **develop effective communication products to share these traditional practices and innovations with communities**
- Assess cost and cost effectiveness of models that incorporate traditional practices. **Offer a range of alternative models and costs.**

6. Invest in both safer rebuilding and future livelihoods by training women and men carpenters, plumbers, masons and others using recognised certified schemes such as CTEVT

- **Design training programs with inclusion and protection needs considered, including for elderly.** In some communities, there are only elderly people. How do we use the skills they bring? Design with the actual pop in mind
- Consider if the **training programs are contextualized strategically** – local value chains, geographic access
- Training needs to **include key messages to build back better**; incorporate key design elements that people have adapted and been able to use.

7. Ensure an INGO collective voice in representing common issues to government and other stakeholders, making use of established networks such as AIN

- What will the implementing structure of the high level reconstruction authority be on the ground? It is important that we **engage with the reconstruction authority to support and influence its planning.**
- Government – DDRC and allocation of various geographic areas – what about transparency and accountability of government for these allocations? How do we best complement and support the government to **promote effectiveness and transparency of government** platforms and processes?

- Beyond government, work with the media. There has been a lot of negative press about INGOs. This is an issue – we should **form a partnership with media and improve the communication, transparency and accountability of our own work.**

8. To contribute better to national and local NGO capacity, recovery plans must be jointly developed with NGO partners, wherein these partners have an equal stake in strategy, direction and sign off

- Current **capacities should be assessed and capacity enhancement plans developed** (not just program, but operations too)
- **Cultivate the relationship of trust and accountability** (3-6 months)
- For strategy and planning, **planning should be classic, from the bottom up** (VDC – district – national), keeping in view needs, voices, ownership of local actors, communities, and government. These efforts should involve all actors in the humanitarian architecture.

9. Work collaboratively to improve two-way communication with communities to counter rumour, maintain clear and consistent messaging and to share feedback and analysis useful to agencies, co ordinating bodies and government. To ensure INGOs are listening to people, monitor and report on how programmes have adapted as a result of community feedback

- There are ways through programme management for communication with communities to be integrated – look for **opportunities within ongoing monitoring of programs to build in accountability measures** (to communities and others)
- Invest in **dedicated human resources for accountability**. Ensure that they are already funded in development proposals
- Bring out collaborative angle – look for **opportunities to work collaboratively to learn together**, e.g. in real time evaluations – and avoid each organisation duplicating these processes.

10. To improve efficiency and effectiveness, invest in significantly improving communication between agencies, within clusters and to government making use of available and emerging digital tools

- The amount of information could be overwhelming (analysis, clever communication). To improve efficiency, is there a **role of OCHA, a UN agency, or perhaps a government agency to bring information together?**
- What's exciting is that this is already beginning to happen – people have the tools. The DDRC infrastructure operates at national and district level and they already have online platforms and data gathering mechanisms. Why reinvent the wheel? Having the **cluster system feed into the DDRC information gathering systems will keep the information updated** and live and avoid duplication. OCHA could put some money in this
- We are interested in longer term aspect – **prepare and disseminate progress against plans**. There can be live progress reports. After significant investment has ended, there will be a record. Agencies will need roles to cover this and agreed formats. Having specialists (instead of generalists) attending cluster meetings will help.

## 5. Advice for my successor for the next big disaster in Nepal

At the final close out meeting of the review team's visit to Nepal, some 40 participants from all DEC/HC member agencies were asked to write down on cards their response to the above question. Their responses are listed below. Many of the statements refer to the need for improved preparedness (such as pre-positioning), improved coordination between and with government and NGOs, and using and/or building community capacity.

- Mock simulations for large and spread-out response
- Tailor interventions that meet specific needs of vulnerable populations, but also which enhance and utilise their capacities/ resources
- Preparedness policy and systems at different levels: VDC, District, National
- Preparedness to be the major focus, both urban and rural
- Preparedness around the tourism industry in Nepal as that is a key contribution to the country's revenue
- Ensure preparedness training is fully carried out in communities
- Disaster preparedness at all levels
- Begin planning recovery activities at the earliest point of the relief operation to ensure more effective transition
- Government priority in disaster management
- Have emergency communications strategy/ protocol in place prior to emergency, to enable mobilisation of resources outside of Nepal when crisis strikes
- Better inter-agency coordination, aligning closely to the plans of the government – better guidance/ framework/ policy by the government
- Partnership with local NGOs (implementation and capacity building)
- Knowing that capacity building takes time, invest in resource, including embedding staff/ accompanying partners to enable them to scale-up and scale-down
- Plan HR activities to avoid gaps and limit short international deployments that “gap fill”
- VDC and ward citizen forum (village/ ward coordination)
- Co ordination of needs assessments, evaluations and monitoring visits so that beneficiaries don't get asked the same questions by different agencies, thus avoiding creating fatigue on recipients (and false expectations/hope)
- Giving information to the public about disaster
- Strong coordination mechanism at all levels
- Capacity building activities of local communities
- Disaster preparedness and immediate response: identify possible disasters (mapping and zoning); strengthen coordination; enhance capacity (resource and technical ability) of government
- Develop a national level emergency response plan
- Prepositioning of immediate items at the community level
- Hard to bring in strategic supplies – use pre-positioning and the local market?
- Identify cash service providers
- Share experience so that people can know what to do during a disaster
- Clear division of work among government and other development partners before for better coordination
- Strong communication mechanism
- Think together, plan together, work together
- Capacity building on emergency to all stakeholders including the DDRC
- Don't just go straight to CGI!
- Utilise and build local capacity
- Social, economic and other related data hub preparation
- Build preparedness in government (national and local) and NGO
- Strategic pre-positioning of basic needs



- Pre-identify supply lines Rescue and equipment – Prepositioning
- Develop SOPs for response and imbibe them (logistics/finance/distributions)
- Coordinated efforts for DRR in Nepal
- Coordination for implementation for next phases and recovery programmes
- High level reconstruction authority (central coordination)
- Get better clarity on rural versus urban response from this operation. What learning has there been? How to build into updated preparedness?
- Local knowledge, appropriate technology, local resources for preparedness & response
- Ensure close communication with government to ensure awareness of any policy changes, allowing for programs to rapidly respond
- Preparedness not just recovery
- Urban livelihoods will drive Nepal's economic recovery so should be prioritised even if affectedness is more hidden or there is not one obvious indicator
- Nepali-led solutions to Nepali challenges – the context and respect for culture here is critical to success
- Carefully review and learn from how preparedness activities translated into the actual response – address challenges
- Share learning & expertise outside of the cluster groups
- Collect and/or maintain/update pre-and post-disaster age, sex and disability disaggregated data
- AIN (coordination among INGOs)
- Think/plan for recovery phase from day one of the response – continuity and build on relief provided
- Better advocacy to enable government to out work their existing plans and policies
- DDRC (district level coordination)
- Multi-sector approach in organisations. Target communities can leverage outcomes, but when covering isolated sectors, ensure close coordination with other organisations
- Map humanitarian partners pre-disaster
- More trainings like first aid, CADRE, etc.
- Existing local partner relationships good
- Invest in local capacity. Focus on equity
- Advise to work with established systems and to be sure to know them and who are local contacts
- Timeliness of project design and implementation must be considered (speed, dignity of beneficiaries, relevance, inclusion).
- Take local staff HR capacities into account/consideration
- Ensure you are able to use duty/custom privileges when importing goods into country
- Better prepared with capacity at the District and local level along with local to district level plans with simulation/testing
- Invest in contingency stocks and training.

## 6. Innovations in the Nepal earthquake response: key findings of the innovation review

A small-scale review was undertaken on how humanitarian innovation worked in the Nepal Earthquake response. The review consisted of desk research and 11 interviews with country directors, innovation and technology specialists, and policy and research staff.

In the interviews conducted as part of the main review and the subsequent innovation-focused analysis, three critical questions emerged on humanitarian innovation in the Nepal earthquake response.

Specifically:

1. Was humanitarian innovation - in terms of new products, processes and approaches to relief and recovery work - needed?
2. Was humanitarian innovation undertaken in ways that met the needs?
3. How might the humanitarian innovation system be strengthened?

The review sought to draw out key messages in relation to these three questions, synthesising answers from across the interviews. While the length of the exercise meant that a comprehensive and detailed answer to the questions has not been feasible, it has generated a number of key messages that relate to the questions, and which give an overall sense of the effectiveness of the innovation effort in the response.

**Key message one: the earthquake presented major operational challenges to international and national actors alike, and demanded a number of operational and strategic adaptations to ensure that effective responses could be mobilised**

For many actors on the ground, the need for creative approaches was apparent in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. There were challenges around assessment, access and delivery that have continued to affect the response. This created a potentially ripe environment for humanitarian organizations to apply and adapt new technologies, form partnerships with new actors, and test new approaches. However, there was little collective or organisational effort to try and make use of this opportunity in the international humanitarian community.

**Key message two: the contextual and political barriers to innovation were considerable**

The Nepal context, and in particular the need for organisations to carefully navigate national and local institutional politics and structures, led many organisations to act in relatively conservative fashion and not 'stick their necks out' to push for novel and creative approaches. For many actors, bringing innovation to bear on the humanitarian challenges created by the earthquake was not just a technical challenge, but also a political one. This begs the question as to whether the sector had sufficient technical or political capacities to make the most of the opportunity. On the basis of respondents, the answer to both questions would seem to be 'no'.

**Key message three: much of the creativity and novelty present in the response were around tactical adaptations to context**

Much of what was referred to as innovation in the response related to tactical operational adjustments, made to adapt organisational efforts to the specific response conditions and challenges. So for example, there were many examples of procedural changes that were

undertaken by DEC/HC members to enable them to work in new settings, with new partners, or to expand their previous sector focus. There were examples of effective ways of engaging local communities, especially youth networks, and savings groups, as volunteers in the relief phase, and platforms for distribution. In particular sectors and areas, there were interesting new partnership developments, for example, the use of remittances companies, which are extensive across Nepal, to channel cash transfers to affected populations. There were also many new variations of existing processes, such as rapid assessments, was of re-allocating staff across offices to meet surge needs, and expedited procurement processes.

While some of these were noteworthy, they amount to what has been described as 'single loop learning', namely finding ways to make the existing processes work better. Much of the 'innovation' has been about adapting existing standard operating procedures to achieve relatively marginal improvements in performance and effectiveness. They were also largely in pockets here and there across the response, rather than systematically integrated into the response as a whole. While such incremental improvements are of course necessary and important, questions remain about whether they were sufficient to meet the challenges of the response and the needs of the Nepali population.

**Key message four: many 'visible' and high-profile innovations had no or little connection to the operational setting**

It was also noted that some of the more externally visible ideas had little or no connection to the frontline of response operations. Humanitarian innovation was described by one respondent as 'disaster-focused technology marketing'. Although this may seem cynical, numerous examples were given of innovative ideas were showcased in the media and in fairs in universities that had not been adopted by any operational organisation and had not seen any real-world testing. This was especially noted in shelter and digital technology areas. While some approaches often became very visible and talked about, they were detached from the humanitarian context. This was described by one respondent as a way of 'defining and solving the humanitarian innovation problem in a way that has no bearing to reality'.

**Key message five: transformative innovation needs foresight and preparedness to be brought effectively into responses**

By contrast to the prevalence of 'single loop learning' there was acknowledged lack of 'double loop learning', or approaches to rethink and finding new ways to achieve the objective. One of the major lessons for the humanitarian innovation community is that without some degree of preparedness and groundwork for more transformative innovative procedures and protocols, they are unlikely to be utilised in emergency responses.

While the majority of the illustrations of this were negative - examples where such foresight and preparedness was lacking - there were some positive examples. For example, some DEC members made good progress in cash responses, thanks to pre-crisis efforts in training on cash responses in emergency relief operations. This helped to establish individual and organisational capacities and made the context more receptive and amenable to the introduction of cash when the response was underway.

The lesson here is not just for operational organisations, but also importantly for funders of innovation, who should consider keeping dedicated resources for crisis-specific applications of previously tested approaches.

**Key message six: resourcing for innovation, although potentially available, was not targeted enough to allow the mobilisation of a critical mass of innovation effort within the emergency response**

The allocation of resources to humanitarian innovation was based largely on institutional allocation of time and resources. Although there have been other emergencies, notably the Ebola response in West Africa, that have triggered specific funds and challenges for innovation, there is no consistency within the sector as to whether such efforts will be made, and such mechanisms will be established.

This means that much innovation that goes on in real-time is not funded, and by contrast, that many funded innovations do not always have good connections to operational responses. This leaves the humanitarian innovation effort in a curious 'Catch-22': it needs to do more to demonstrate its operational relevance, but it will not get the resources to do so until it demonstrates its operational relevance.

**Key message seven: almost all of the innovation that took place in the response was within specific organisations, with very little happening in a cross-organisational fashion**

Much of the effort in innovation is highly fragmented, mean that there is both waste and duplication, but also that there are numerous missed opportunities. For example, many organisations talked about the use of some form of mobile monitoring, or digital mapping of the crisis, and so on, but much of this was replicated within different organisations. More collaboration would lead to much better use of scarce resources, and to find solutions that can be supported collectively.

At the present time, the innovation efforts were fragmented even within organisations, with different sectoral responses having very different ways of engaging with the innovation question. While mechanisms such as the clusters did in some cases raise innovation-related issues, they were not typically high priority issues.

**Key message eight: insufficient attention was paid by international organisations to the role of local organisations and end-users in innovation**

One key area of discussion was the extent to which end-users own priorities, needs and capacities played a role in innovation efforts in the response. The overall message that this was not yet a major priority for the international aid organisation. There was a tendency to focus on internal stakeholders and innovations that focused on their needs. As one respondent put it, 'we are still really doing innovations in and for aid processes, not innovations with and for communities'.

There was also very little attention paid to those innovations that could empower and enable end-users to take control of their lives. Where this happened, it was despite the international community rather than because of it. There were some examples of efforts that opened up the innovation process, and made use of the considerable potential of the skills and talents within communities, these tended to be those innovations that emerged from Nepali organisations that engaged directly with communities and involved them directly in the innovation process. Examples include engagement of diaspora expertise in community-based reconstruction efforts, the engagement of Nepali cooperative banking sector to finance early response, and others. While it must be noted that such innovations can be localized solutions to problems of response and recovery, and therefore may not always be replicable, the fact is that they are often completely off the radar of international organisations. As a result, the novel ideas that could potentially have had positive effects across the response were not fully grasped by international humanitarian organisations.

**Key message nine: innovation needs to be thought about and undertaken in a much more open and democratic fashion than is currently the case**

The lack of sensitivity described above did not just relate to end-users in communities but also to potential operational partners. There were numerous promising innovations from Nepali organisations themselves, such as the Kathmandu Living Labs, which creates digital maps of the landscape and partnered with various government bodies. The military trialled interesting information management approaches, and some private sector organisations and diaspora organisations developed novel forms of fundraising. But these initiatives were poorly linked to by the international humanitarian community as a whole, whose mindsets, processes, organisational structures and networks proved rather insensitive to the kinds of ideas and approaches that were emerging ‘real-time’ on the ground. Instead what was seen as innovative was largely that which had some form of legitimacy and credibility within the formal sector. This served to limit the potential of radical and challenging ideas that could have been more suited to the national and local context.

## **Conclusions**

Although there has been an encouraging increase in interest in humanitarian innovation, as well as positive signals from major donors and implementing actors, the Nepal DEC/HC experience suggests that there is still some way to go before innovation becomes a mainstream operational focus for humanitarian organisations. Instead what was observed was at best a nascent system, with very small-scale efforts to try out new approaches, but with insufficient investment and infrastructure to make the effort really meaningful.

At the current time, if the Nepal experience is anything to go by, there is simply not enough concentrated attention being paid to how to bring innovation to the frontline of emergency response work. This should serve as a wake-up call for the sector as a whole: if more is to be done in humanitarian innovation, much more effort needs to be paid to focusing on where it matters the most. More effort must be made to fully operationalise innovation so that it makes the most transformative contribution to response efforts. This means at a minimum:

- more operational preparedness for innovation efforts in different settings, to include training, pre-emergency piloting, and establishing necessary partnerships for developing and testing innovations
- establishing crisis-specific funding mechanisms and innovation support mechanisms, to enable innovation efforts to be strengthened and amplified
- mechanisms for drawing in ideas and insights from end-users, local organisations
- mechanisms for facilitating cross-organisational innovation efforts in specific areas, so as to pool limited resources.

Overall, the findings about humanitarian innovation need to be linked to, and contextualised within, wider findings about weaknesses of the humanitarian action. It is perhaps unsurprising that the innovation field should replicate some of the self-same challenges as the wider sector. However, as innovation is being positioned as one possible set of solutions to the ailments affecting the sector, there is also a need for a good hard look at whether innovation efforts are being thought about, developed and strategised in ways that could ultimately change the way that aid is delivered. On this current, admittedly brief, review there is some way to go. As the present time, innovation efforts appear to have a lot in common with previous efforts to change and improve the sector. On the present showing, whether innovation efforts will always remain marginal to humanitarian responses or might become more central in the future, remains very much an open question.