



# 2015 NEPAL EARTHQUAKE APPEAL FINAL REPORT



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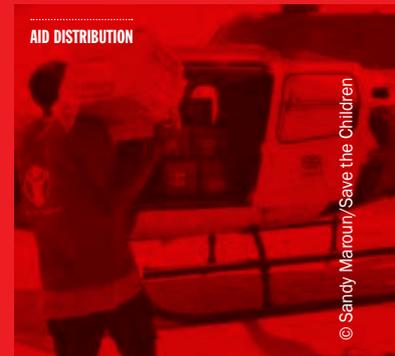
Save the  
Children

tearfund

World Vision

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# OVERVIEW

Nepal was shaken by a deadly 7.8 magnitude earthquake on 25 April 2015 – the strongest to hit the country since 1934 – causing far-reaching destruction. Two weeks later, on 12 May, another earthquake close to Mount Everest, with a magnitude of 7.3, led to further devastation and loss of life. A total of 8,891 people were confirmed dead and more than 22,000 injured as a result of the two quakes.

Hundreds of thousands of houses were destroyed and damaged, along with key infrastructure including schools, health facilities, access roads, temples and heritage sites. Overall, 8.1 million people were affected, with some 200,000 people temporarily displaced from their homes.<sup>1</sup>

Two days after the first earthquake, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) launched an emergency appeal to the UK public, requesting funds to support all 13 DEC member charities to respond to huge and far-ranging needs.<sup>2</sup> Eleven of the DEC member charities were already on the ground in Nepal and all were able to mobilise quickly. The appeal raised £87 million, with £55 million channelled directly to the DEC,

including £5 million in Aid Match from the UK Government, and the remaining £32 million donated directly to DEC member charities.

DEC-funded activities in Nepal took place over two phases. **The initial six-month emergency phase, from April to September 2015**, provided approximately 1.6 million people with essential support such as emergency shelter, food, cash and relief supplies. With so many homes destroyed, a big priority in this first phase was to equip people with tarpaulins, ropes and more durable shelter kits (corrugated galvanised iron sheeting and tools). This was accompanied in many cases by guidance on safer construction techniques.

Providing people with the money they needed to buy their own shelter materials was also very important in areas where these materials were readily available in local markets.

Where water sources had been damaged or rerouted due to the earthquake, DEC member charities trucked water and rehabilitated or constructed new water points.

**The second phase of DEC-funded activities, from October 2015 to April 2018**, focused on recovery and reconstruction, in particular on training people in the skills needed to rebuild their communities, such as masonry and brick production. Livelihoods recovery and providing families with the money to build permanent homes was also a priority, as was rebuilding damaged infrastructure such as schools and water facilities. Meeting the needs of the most vulnerable was at the heart of the DEC response, with much work done to include and support people living with disabilities, women and children, those without land and marginalised Dalit<sup>3</sup> and ethnic communities. Activities included skills training, awareness raising and provision of safe spaces where people could meet and receive help.

An independent review<sup>4</sup> commissioned by the DEC highlighted a number of points, including using DEC funds to train local tradespeople to rebuild damaged homes, an approach that was later adopted across the response. The issue of women feeling side-lined by initial recovery efforts was also raised and subsequently addressed by DEC member charities through activities aimed at their empowerment.



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

## Emergency relief and early recovery (April to September 2015)

**59,900**

emergency shelter kits were distributed



**233,200**

people gained access to safe drinking water



**48,200**

food parcels were distributed



**66,000**

people benefitted from household essentials such as pans and solar lamps



**180**

local masons were trained



**121,700**

people received medical care



## Recovery and reconstruction (October 2015 to April 2018)

**9,000**

permanent earthquake resilient houses



**7,600**

temporary shelters were built



**40**

schools were rebuilt, repaired or made more resilient



**7,400**

toilets were built or repaired



**2,400**

women were trained to become masons



**12,500**

women and girls took part in activities to improve their safety



# BACKGROUND

Nepal is situated on the Main Central Thrust, a major geological fault, making it highly vulnerable to earthquake activity. Since the occurrence of a hugely devastating earthquake in 1934, Nepal has been preparing for another big quake.

The Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium has been active since 2009 and brings together government, donors, development banks and aid charities to plan and prepare for major disasters. With its dense population and precarious, unregulated buildings, Kathmandu, the capital, was the focus of earthquake preparedness work and contingency planning. However, the epicentre of the April 2015 earthquake was in fact in Gorkha, just northwest of the Kathmandu Valley and, while Kathmandu was affected, the most extensive damage was across 14 districts, all situated in predominantly rural areas, many of which were extremely remote, mountainous and hard to reach.

Even before the earthquake, these areas already experienced high rates of poverty and vulnerability.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the marginalisation of certain ethnic groups and deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes apparent in Nepali society made living conditions precarious and access to resources difficult for many of those affected by the earthquake.

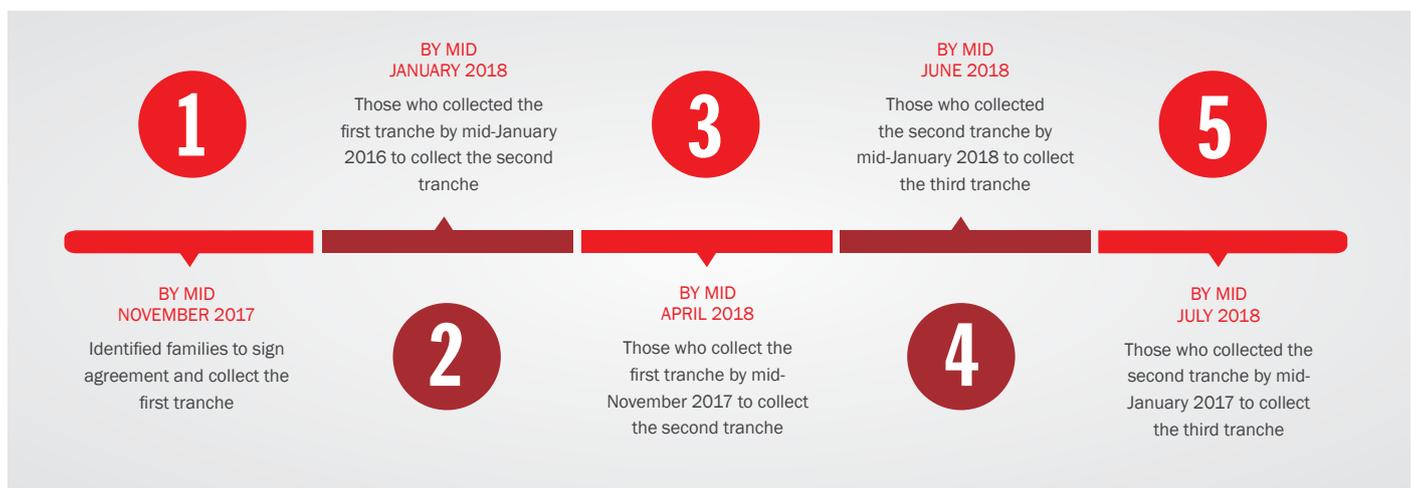
## THE NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY

Following the earthquake, the Government of Nepal prioritised the rebuilding of damaged and destroyed houses. It issued earthquake identity cards to those who had suffered such losses, which were then used to identify households to receive aid.<sup>6</sup> The Government also set up the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), an institution tasked with providing guidance to affected households, and to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including DEC member charities, on how to rebuild.

The NRA was also responsible for providing reconstruction cash grants, disbursed in three tranches, to enable eligible families to build more earthquake-resilient houses. These grants formed the core of the Government's support for earthquake survivors.<sup>7</sup> In an attempt to ensure safer construction, the NRA issued a policy whereby each tranche of funding was released only if household rebuilding complied with certain standards.

However, delays in setting up this institution, which was established eight months after the earthquake, and in issuing plans for shelter reconstruction proved a major hindrance to recovery. DEC member charities had to hold back on finalising designs for permanent shelters while they awaited sign-off from the NRA. During this time, faced with a lack of adequate shelter from monsoon rains and cold weather, many people went ahead and rebuilt their homes with little or no technical assistance in 'building back safer'. More than 20,000 houses did not meet housing guidelines and were subsequently refused the second tranche of funding from the NRA unless improvements were made through reconstruction and retrofitting. DEC member charities were therefore frequently faced with the challenge of helping families to reinforce their homes to enable them to access further government grants.

## TIMELINE FOR RECONSTRUCTION GRANTS



# HOW WE HELPED

The DEC Nepal Earthquake Appeal raised £87 million and all 13 DEC member charities took part in the response. Within a week of the appeal launch, the DEC allocated £33 million to member charities. Six months after the launch of the appeal, direct DEC income reached £55 million, including £5 million Aid Match from the UK Government, with a further £32 million donated directly to members.

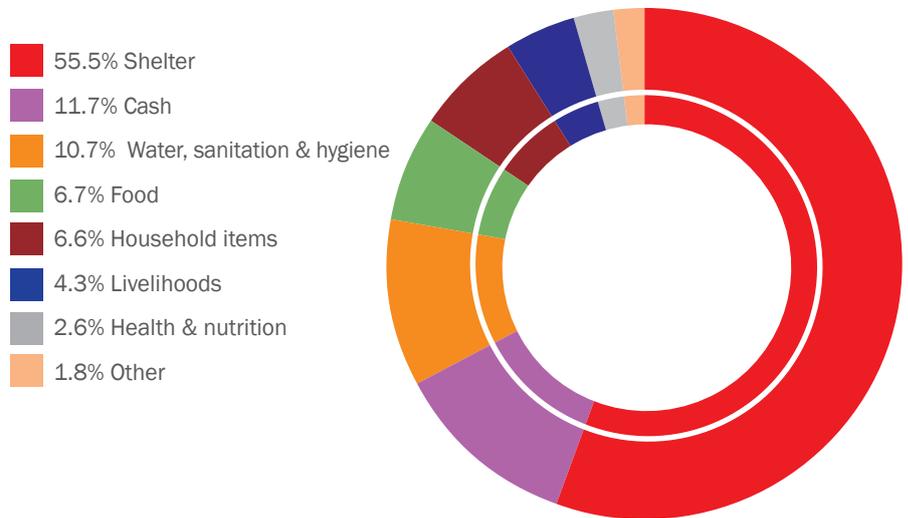
With approximately 2.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and over 800,000 homes destroyed or damaged,<sup>8</sup> providing people with shelter was key during the first six months of the DEC-funded response. This need was made more urgent by the fast-approaching monsoon season (which began just two months after the disaster). DEC member charities, working closely with local partners and the Nepali authorities, distributed nearly 59,900 emergency shelter kits and over 100,000 packs of durable shelter materials. In remoter areas, giving each family a shelter kit, sometimes using helicopters, ensured that people had access to materials that were not readily available in local markets, or where markets were too distant to reach. However, when markets began to revive in some areas, DEC member charities provided cash to 90,000 families, giving them greater autonomy over their recovery as well as stimulating the local economy.

DEC-funded work also helped to ensure the safety of women and children, who were particularly vulnerable to trafficking and gender-based violence. Providing women and children with safe spaces where they could meet, talk, receive counselling and seek help was a critical part of the early response.

After the first six months, the focus shifted to rebuilding crucial community infrastructure such as water works, sanitation facilities and schools and the construction of permanent housing. This latter task still included the provision of building materials, but also placed greater emphasis on equipping people with the skills and expertise they would need to 'build back safer' – or ensure construction was more resilient to future disasters.

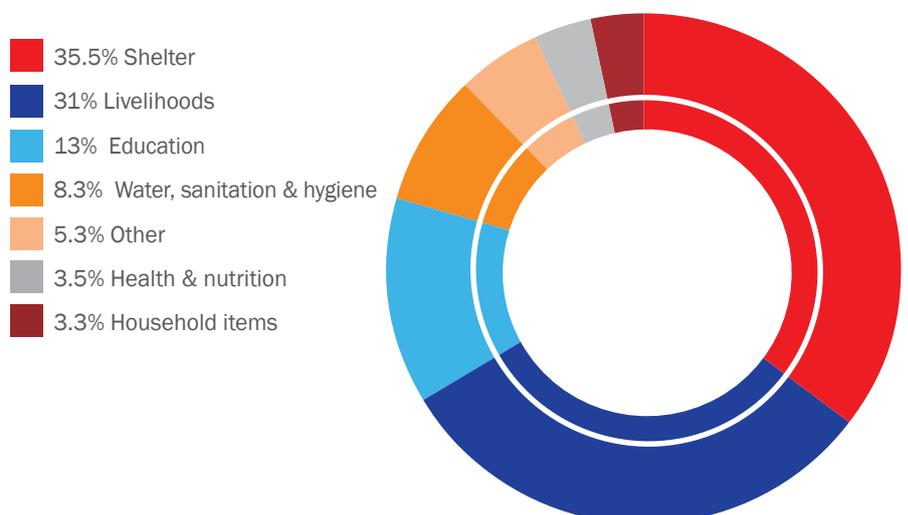
## Phase 1 expenditure by sector

Period covered: April to September 2015



## Phase 2 expenditure by sector

Period covered: October 2015 to April 2018



This included training in masonry and carpentry, hands-on guidance and construction demonstration sessions. Another critical element of the DEC response was to help people whose assets, businesses and farmland had been damaged or destroyed to start earning a living again. DEC funds provided seeds, tools, livestock and cash grants for small businesses. In all, across the second phase of the DEC response, DEC funds reached 1.2 million people and assisted them to rebuild their lives.

“We had no proper place to stay as my house was damaged by the earthquake. Now we have this house to live in. It is strong and very well made. I feel that if there is another earthquake then we will survive in this house as the foundation and the walls are very strong.”

Hom Bahadur Bhandari, Gorkha.

### Shelter: building back safer

With the Government of Nepal taking the lead in reconstruction by providing grants to people whose homes had been destroyed or damaged, a key task for DEC member charities was to support families to access these grants. As each tranche of funding was only accessible if reconstruction was to a particular standard (see **The National Reconstruction Authority**, page 3), training in building techniques, including earthquake-resilient reconstruction, was essential.

Using DEC funds, member charities trained local people as masons and carpenters and employed them to provide support to their communities. This took the form of door-to-door visits or demonstration houses, where trained experts provided instruction as well as technical skills and guidance. Where people were unable to carry out reconstruction work themselves (e.g. where hard physical labour was unsuitable for household members), DEC funds were used to build permanent homes for them. In total, 3,800 permanent houses were built in this way, and fully funded by the DEC. Another 5,200 houses were partially funded by the DEC to be completed by members with funds from other sources, and overall, approximately 16,600 families received DEC funds to rebuild their homes.

A priority for the DEC-funded response has been to ensure that people are far better prepared and protected in the event of

another earthquake. This has led to a focus on ‘build back safer’ techniques being integrated into building guidance and in the safe construction of schools, including disaster risk reduction plans developed with teachers and children (see **Improving education**, page 9). Further efforts to better prepare and respond to natural disasters included working with communities and authorities to create disaster management committees. With DEC funds, one member charity set up 20 such committees with 500 community members. These committees advocated for authorities to include disaster mitigation and response preparedness planning in their work and as a result, funding has now been allocated for this. The committees also developed disaster risk management plans and 900 local people took part in community-based disaster risk reduction training.

### HIGHLIGHTS



- **59,900** families received materials such as tarpaulin and groundsheets for emergency shelters
- **7,600** temporary shelters were built altogether
- **9,000** permanent, earthquake-resilient homes were built for vulnerable families





## BUILDING BACK SAFER

This impressively staged and well-received drama was performed by professional actors from the Community Kala Group Kathmandu, recruited by a DEC member charity to help convey the importance of safer construction to reduce the risk of further disasters.

*Voices of protest resound from the classroom behind the improvised stage. The voices belong to victims of the devastating earthquakes who now reside in Yamalok – the residence of Yama, the ruler of the departed. They are calling for better food and a clean environment. Upset by the demanding nature of the Nepali new arrivals, Yama decides to prevent a future inflow of similar people into his kingdom by reducing the likelihood of death through natural disasters in Nepal. Thus, with a noisy fanfare, a messenger from Yamalok is sent to earth to choose individuals who can help the population stay safe by teaching them about disaster risk reduction. The couple chosen for the task is caught up in a fight when the underworld ambassador arrives. Terrified by the unexpected visitor, they not only immediately forget about their argument, but also agree to ensure the safety of the people by advocating for safe building construction and the safety of children on their way to school.*

## Making a living

Along with the destruction of houses, the earthquake also had a devastating impact on people's means of making a living. Rural areas bore the brunt of both earthquakes and smallholder farming and family businesses suffered massively when grain stores were destroyed, livestock was killed, and land was covered with rubble and debris. With their homes destroyed, many people were also forced to sell off any surviving assets (often animals) to pay for building materials, leading to the collapse of small home-based businesses and putting many people's main source of income in jeopardy.

During the initial few months after the earthquake, DEC funds were used to replenish agricultural stocks, including seeds and tools to ensure that families were able to continue essential food production. Later in the response, DEC member charities sought out long-term, sustainable strategies to help people find ways to make a living and become self-sufficient again. One DEC member provided cash grants to more than 8,000 of the most vulnerable families who could then decide how best to invest the money in order to make a living. These grants were used in diverse ways, such as

buying pigs and goats, and even a cow for milk production (see **Cash for a cow**, page 8), as well as purchasing supplies for small businesses such as shoe-making and blacksmithing. DEC funds helped farmers obtain insurance for their livestock, and trained vets who were then linked with farmers so that further animal losses could be avoided.

Providing training was an important approach to help people recover from the disaster. In total, 19,000 people received business training, which covered a large variety of skills such as account keeping, business plan development, tailoring, knitting, plumbing, electric wiring and brick production. With skilled tradespeople in short supply, 2,400 women were trained as masons and carpenters, which not only increased the efficiency of the response but also went some way to empower women and provide opportunities to challenge inequalities.

One DEC member charity trained more than 5,000 farmers on techniques to make agriculture more sustainable and resilient to climatic shocks. This included the creation of 19 model farms where participants could try out new farming practices and share

expertise. Additionally, farmers from one district were able to visit model farms in other areas to witness different farming techniques at first hand.

Supporting worker collectives, cooperatives and producer groups has been another key strategy. DEC funds helped to train more than 17,000 cooperative members in financial management and provided cooperatives with equipment and tools for members' use. Women's collectives were also set up, enabling 3,900 women to start saving monthly and develop business plans.

## HIGHLIGHTS



- **8,000** families were given cash grants to invest in small businesses
- **19** model farms were set up to teach new farming techniques
- **17,000** cooperative members were trained in financial management
- **7,000** people were trained as masons and carpenters, including 2,400 women

## TRAINING MASONS

Gyan Laxmi worked as an unskilled labourer before the earthquake. “I just used to carry the bricks,” she says, laughing. “I knew about how to build a house before the training, but no one would recruit me as a mason as I was only semi-skilled.”

Gyan heard that the DEC was funding training sessions for masons, covering earthquake-safe techniques. She put herself forward for the training.

“After the training I knew everything I needed to. The buildings I am building now are safer than before. I learned lots of different techniques in the training, such as rendering and lapping. They are earthquake-safe techniques.”

Gyan has now established herself as a head mason, which is very unusual. “Many women are trained as masons but no one here is working as a head mason,” she says. “It’s unique to me and the community too.” Gyan is forging a path for other women to rise to management positions.

Not only is Gyan helping to build safer homes for families in Nepal, but her own family is also benefitting. “Before the training, I earned 500 Nepali rupees a day, now I earn 900,” she says. This is an 80% increase and equates to just under £7 a day. As a single mother to three sons between the ages of 12 and 22, this extra cash is appreciated.

“I spend money on a range of things such as my child’s education and daily expenses like food,” she says. “I’m pleased I was able to get this training. It’s hard work but I’m used to it and I enjoy it.”



© British Red Cross

## Providing food and replacing household essentials

In the initial weeks following the earthquake, food parcels containing basic items such as rice, lentils and cooking oil were given to 48,000 families. Solar lamps, kitchen utensils and cooking pots were also provided. After the first three months, when markets were functioning again, cash grants were provided with DEC funds so that families could buy their own food and other essentials. During the first six months of the DEC response, member charities provided cash grants to 90,000 families.

### HIGHLIGHTS



- **48,000** families received food parcels
- **90,000** families received cash to buy food and other essentials
- **100,000** families received household essentials such as pots and pans in the first six months of the DEC response

## WOMEN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

In Nepal, 29% of families have at least one member living overseas. Most are men who have gone abroad to seek work in order to send their earnings back to their families.<sup>9</sup> These remittances constitute 23% of the country’s GDP, making Nepal fifth in the world in terms of the contribution of remittances to GDP.<sup>10</sup> Remittances played an important role in helping families to get back on their feet after the earthquake. However, this trend of working overseas also meant that many families were missing fathers, husbands and brothers, which increased the burden on other family members in the reconstruction of homes. Training women and men to become masons or to provide door-to-door guidance and support on reconstruction are just two of the ways in which DEC funds have helped in this situation.

## Clean water, sanitation and hygiene

With water sources disrupted by the earthquake, many communities were left without access to their local water points. This meant that drinking water and water used for washing, cleaning, crop irrigation and house reconstruction was no longer available, or only available at a great distance, often on foot. To respond to this need, 11 DEC member charities focused on rebuilding water infrastructure across the many districts affected by the earthquake. In total, DEC funds were used to supply 68,000 people with clean water by installing new water systems and restoring damaged ones. One DEC member formed nine water safety groups with 805 members, who worked to ensure that water was safe to drink at nine different water points.

An effective way to improve sanitation and hygiene conditions for children has

been the rehabilitation and improvement of toilets and water points in schools. DEC funds were used extensively in 32 schools to provide clean, safe water and build toilets. Such measures can have a huge impact on children's health and well-being, as well as ensuring adequate menstrual hygiene facilities for girls, encouraging them not to miss school.

A total of 7,400 toilets were built and repaired in people's homes, providing people with new or improved facilities. With DEC funds, 10 community bathing cubicles were constructed, which provided adolescent girls and women with somewhere safe to wash in private.

DEC funds also supported hygiene promotion campaigns, which emphasised the importance of simple measures such as regular handwashing to

prevent the spread of disease. In one area, 30 community volunteers were trained and reached 600 people and nearly 300 schoolchildren with key information on good hygiene. Street drama also proved a lively and effective way to engage local communities. In total 129,500 people were reached with these types of messages.

### HIGHLIGHTS



- **68,000** people were given access to clean water through new or repaired water systems
- **32** schools were equipped with clean water and toilet facilities
- **7,400** domestic toilets were built or repaired

## CASH FOR A COW

Ram is head of a large household. Six family members live with him, including his wife, two sons, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren.

"After the earthquake, we ran into the fields and stayed there for two months," says Ram. "My daughter-in-law had given birth just a few days before the earthquake. We had the baby's naming ceremony in the field as we couldn't go inside the house. We named her Rashab."

Ram makes a small living from farming and received a cash grant from one DEC member charity to help improve his family's standard of living. Ram chose to put his grant towards buying a pregnant cow.

"It gave birth nine days ago so now we have a little calf too," he says. "I kept cattle before the earthquake and my cow survived, but it stopped giving milk, so we sold it at the market. I had been saving to buy a cow but receiving the cash grant encouraged me to do so sooner. It meant I didn't have to worry about borrowing the extra money I needed from a neighbour, or worry about owing a debt." The family affectionately call the cow Brownie. The calf is yet to be named. In the near future, Ram hopes to expand his herd.



## BUILDING RESERVOIRS

One DEC member worked with its local partner to renovate a reservoir for a village in Gorkha. The people of that area now use water from the reservoir for all their daily needs.

“It has been a great relief for us as we do not have to travel for hours every day for water,” explains Januka Khadka, one of the villagers. “We drink, wash, cook, clean with this water. Our area had great water problems but now with this, it is very easy.” The 8,000-litre reservoir now serves 23 families in the village.



## Health and psychological support

Following the earthquake, many clinics and health posts were completely or partially damaged, while at the same time, poor sanitation conditions, food scarcity and overcrowding led to increased health risks. To respond to these immediate needs, DEC funds were used to set up temporary health facilities and to provide essential medicines and screening and treatment for children suffering from acute malnutrition. Pregnant and breastfeeding women were also able to attend sessions where they could learn about maternal and child health, breastfeeding, and sanitation.

In the second phase of the DEC response, the focus was on rebuilding long-lasting infrastructure. With DEC funds, one member charity rehabilitated a health post which provides improved facilities for more than 3,500 people. In particular, nearly 2,000 women will now have access to a new birthing centre, equipped with a delivery bed, medical supplies and an incubator, powered by environmentally sustainable solar power.

Addressing mental health and well-being was also crucial; the trauma of two powerfully destructive earthquakes and subsequent aftershocks left many people in need of assistance. DEC funds

helped provide psychosocial support, including counselling for more than 2,000 people, and safe spaces where vulnerable children and women could gather for training and recreation and access psychosocial support and trauma counselling.

To address longer-term mental health care capacity, one DEC member charity trained 29 primary health care staff to integrate mental health and psychosocial support into routine primary health care for older people. With DEC funds, another member charity carried out a Children’s Resilience Programme, which applied a psycho-educational method to improve children’s well-being. Through 13 structured workshops and recreational activities, children and parents were given the skills and confidence to cope with future challenges as well as recover from their past trauma.

## Improving education

Most children were not at school when the earthquake struck on 25 April 2015, as it was a Saturday.<sup>11</sup> If they had been, the impact could have been even more devastating: in Sindhupalchok district alone, 89% of classrooms were reduced to rubble; in Tistung municipality, eight out of 12 schools were left unusable. Similar devastation was found throughout all earthquake-affected areas. In the weeks and months following the disaster, huge efforts were made to provide temporary learning spaces for schoolchildren, so that their education would not be too disrupted. In the second phase of the DEC response, member charities worked hard to reconstruct permanent and earthquake-resistant schools, with improved toilet and handwashing facilities.

Many of the school re-building programmes also integrated activities to teach children and teachers what to do in the case of another earthquake or natural disaster. School-based disaster preparedness training was carried out in 70 schools, along with the development of school safety plans. One DEC member charity developed plans for 15 schools, including safety measures such as retaining walls to protect against natural hazards, and evacuation areas. DEC funds also helped provide schools with supplies such as first-aid kits, helmets and stretchers. About 40 schools received DEC funds for reconstruction and repairs.

### HIGHLIGHTS



- **3,500** people are benefitting from a renovated health post
- **2,000** people received psychosocial support, including counselling
- **29** primary health care staff were trained to support older people

### HIGHLIGHTS



- **70** schools received disaster preparedness training
- **40** schools were rebuilt, repaired or made more resilient
- **200** temporary classrooms were built in 41 schools



## TEMPORARY CLASSROOMS

DEC funds helped to build 200 temporary classrooms in 41 schools in Sindhupalchok shortly after the earthquake.

“When the children came back, they were traumatised and afraid,” the headmaster explains. “We suspended classes for five days and ran a special programme with singing and dancing. This helped to calm the children. It helped a lot that students learned in class how to behave in case of an emergency and how to protect themselves from natural disasters.”

## Protecting vulnerable people

The huge strain placed on people’s financial, material and mental well-being as a result of the earthquake, alongside the loss of family protection, led to an increased risk of child labour, early marriage for girls and boys, sexual and gender-based violence and human trafficking.<sup>12</sup> With DEC funds, member charities addressed these risks using a variety of approaches. One member charity mobilised 17 self-help groups to raise awareness of the risk of gender-based violence and other protection issues through a combination of meetings, radio programmes, street drama and puppet shows, reaching 20,000 people. A two-day national conference was also organised for 120 officials from law enforcement agencies to enhance their knowledge and expertise on gender-based violence and women’s rights.

The child-friendly and women-friendly spaces set up with DEC funds also served as safe places for children to play and for women to meet, talk, share experiences and receive counselling as well as information on how to seek help, should they feel at risk from any of the issues outlined above.

## HIGHLIGHTS



- **12,500** women and girls took part in activities to improve their safety and security
- **17** self-help groups were set up to raise awareness of gender-based violence, reaching 20,000 people
- **120** law enforcement officials were trained on gender-based violence and women’s rights

## MAKING A STAND FOR THOSE WITHOUT LAND

Thousands of people, especially women, were deprived of government grants to rebuild their homes since they did not own land they were living on at the time of the earthquake or could not prove ownership, as required by the Government of Nepal. Many people had either lost documents or did not formally own the land where they lived. Land tenure is largely undocumented in Nepal and women are often excluded because they are less likely to inherit land or have land registered in their name. Under Nepal’s constitution adopted in September 2015, women have equal rights to own land, but inheritance laws mean that only a few actually do.<sup>13</sup>

In response, one DEC member charity created ‘land rights forums’ as platforms through which landless people can lobby the Government and advocate for their entitlements to land and to grants to rebuild their homes. Ten training sessions were organised which focused on leadership and campaigning in order to equip people to engage with local advocacy work and to link up with other networks, alliances and civil society organisations at regional and national levels. A further four sessions were held to help women develop leadership skills and lobby for access to and control over the land they lived and worked on. DEC funds helped 184 landless farmers to file applications for land acquisition, and, so far, 53 have received land. In addition, joint land ownership certificates have been awarded to more than 120 couples as a result of awareness campaigns and training.

# HOW DEC MEMBERS PERFORMED

DEC member charities are committed to improving the way in which they respond to crises, working closely with and for affected communities, including vulnerable people, and following international standards on delivering aid.

## Working in partnership and building community capacity

Two months after the earthquake, the Government of Nepal stipulated that all international organisations must work through local (national and community-based) organisations. For some DEC member charities, this reflected their normal way of working and many had pre-existing partnerships, enabling them to respond rapidly and benefit from any preparedness work that had already taken place. For example, one DEC member charity had worked with a large national Nepali organisation during the three years prior to the earthquake, positioning stock, and providing training in first aid, search and rescue and mass communication linked to raising awareness about an earthquake threat. Working with civil society in this way provided great opportunities for international charities to gain acceptance and insight into the local dynamics and context, helping them to make the best decisions regarding how DEC funds were spent. Partnerships also helped ensure the sustainability of expertise within Nepal, by building the capacity of local organisations to respond to disasters. Through the international experience of DEC member charities, knowledge and lessons learned from previous crises worldwide could also be shared and applied to the Nepal context.

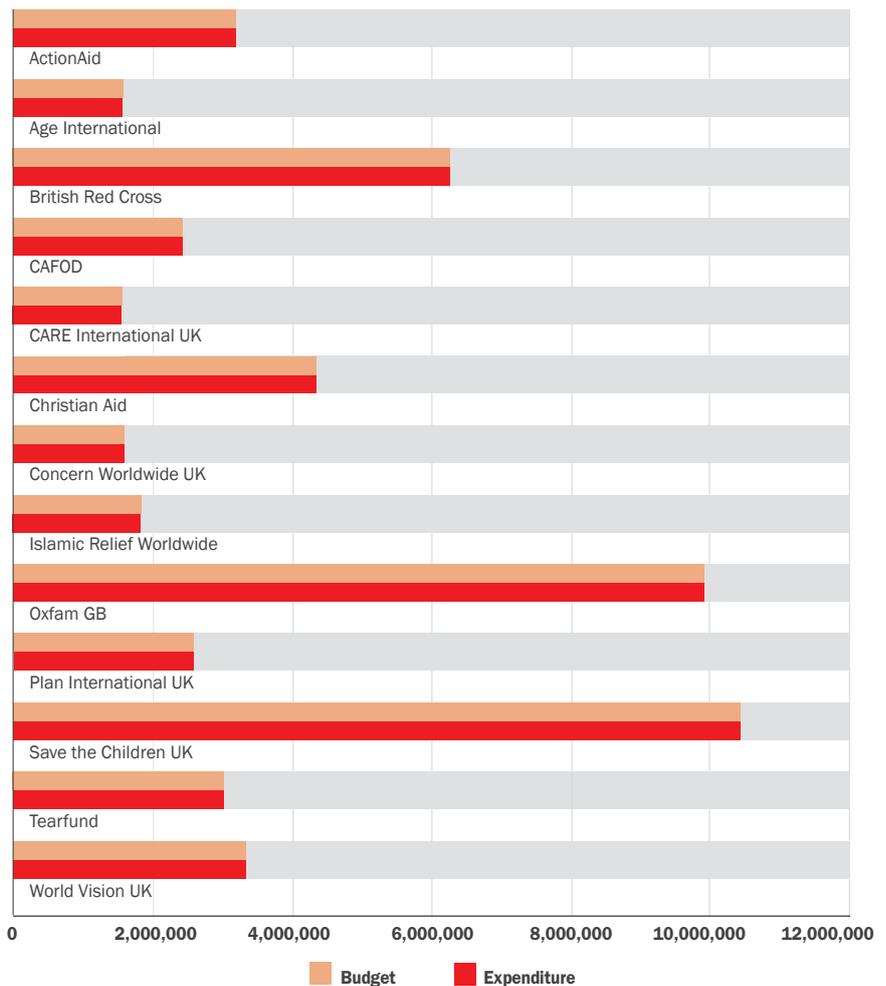
Building local capacity and skills was a major focus of the DEC response, both in terms of the work carried out with

Nepali organisations and with those affected by the earthquake. DEC member charities were able to strengthen the skills and expertise of local organisations in financial management, humanitarian standards and NGO governance.

For disaster-affected people, training was extremely practical and imparted skills in areas such as business planning, masonry, brick making and managing water infrastructure.

## Total expenditure of DEC funds (£)

All 13 DEC member charities responded



## PROVIDING THE RIGHT QUALIFICATIONS

To invest in safer rebuilding and to secure future employment for people affected by the earthquake, DEC funds helped to provide local masons with training using the nationally recognised qualification, CTEVT (Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training). This improved their skills in earthquake-resilient reconstruction techniques and made them more employable, therefore aiding their own recovery and that of the communities around them.

### Following sector standards and being accountable to people affected by the crisis

## HUMANITARIAN STANDARDS AND CODES

- Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – this outlines ethical standards of how organisations and individuals involved in humanitarian work should perform
- Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability – this covers the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action
- Sphere Technical Standards – these define minimum standards for aid work in areas such as shelter, food, water and health care

Providing principled, high-quality and accountable humanitarian aid is at the core of what it means to be a DEC member. All member charities have made a commitment to a number of standards

that set out guidelines, principles and definitions of good practice in responding in a crisis (see **Humanitarian standards and codes**). An important way to meet these standards in Nepal was to ensure that those people affected by the earthquake were instrumental in deciding how DEC funds were used to meet their needs. DEC member charities were quick to put in place a wide range of mechanisms to ensure a high level of transparency and accountability in their responses to the earthquake. Information sharing and communicating messages about what aid communities could expect to receive were key to achieving this. Radio, transparency boards, banners, help desks and community mobilisers were used for these purposes.

One member charity set up community reconstruction committees, with equal participation of both men and women; these committees – whose principal role was to support and monitor housing reconstruction – were involved in identifying the most vulnerable or marginalised in their communities to ensure they were first on the list to receive aid. With committee members part of and embedded in the community itself, they were in a good position to talk to people and monitor how satisfied they were with DEC members' work.

DEC member charities provided different channels through which communities could raise complaints, including complaints boxes in some villages and toll-free telephone numbers. However, initially there was limited awareness among affected communities about their right to be heard and provide feedback. Socio-cultural practices and power dynamics between men and women or between people in different socioeconomic positions made it difficult for vulnerable groups to fully express their opinions.

Many DEC member charities reported that people seemed most at ease giving feedback face to face. To enable this to happen, regular meetings were held, and staff were appointed to focus primarily on

the task of ensuring the voices of the most vulnerable were heard. One DEC member held public reviews on the sites of the schools they were building, where they updated the community about construction progress. In order for schoolchildren to feel comfortable participating in these reviews, training sessions were held on how to provide feedback. Household visits ensured that those who could not attend meetings were included.

### Including people with special needs

There are many factors that influence people's vulnerability to a disaster. Poverty, inequalities, exclusion and discrimination frequently place senior citizens, people living with disabilities, minorities, women and children in the most precarious conditions. In Nepal, caste discrimination still exists, in particular for Dalits, a section of society traditionally deemed as 'untouchable'. Following a disaster, it is often these people who have less opportunity to weigh in on key decision-making about how emergency aid is provided and what form recovery should take.<sup>14</sup>

DEC member charities therefore focused their support on these vulnerable groups, though this proved difficult initially, since the Government insisted on a blanket approach, prescribing that charities should



reach as many people as possible with the same type and amount of aid, to dispel any perceptions of disparity (an important principle in Nepali society). Taking the position that some people were more seriously affected by the quake than others, due to their pre-existing vulnerabilities, DEC member charities negotiated with local authorities, convincing them in some cases of the advantage of using limited resources to reach the most vulnerable. In one district, a DEC member successfully advocated for local authorities to adopt this targeted approach for the whole area. In these instances, it was vital to offer communities a clear explanation of the rationale behind this type of targeted aid, to avoid tensions.

DEC member charities also adapted the way they provided aid to ensure that no one was left out. Technical assistance in construction was offered by female staff during door-to-door visits, since most women said they preferred to receive advice and guidance in this way. Childcare was also provided for women who were breastfeeding and couldn't leave their babies at home, so they could fully participate in on-the-job training.

DEC funds supported the Government in distributing citizenship certificates and other social security documents to marginalised groups, enabling them to access government services more easily.

## Coordination

Coordinating a disaster response to ensure aid reaches the places where it is most needed is a challenge after every disaster, and in the aftermath of the earthquake in Nepal it was no different.

The Government of Nepal took a clear lead in responding to the earthquake, but the frequent political changes and events that took place over the months and years following the quake (see **Key Challenges and Risks – Political restructuring**, page 14) has meant that coordination between the many different organisations involved in the response has been challenging.

Initially, a gap in coordination between national and district-level governments led to variances in the way that districts interpreted central policies about delivering aid. This meant that organisations had to adapt their approaches in each district. In addition, government mechanisms for providing data and information were weak, which sometimes led to confusion about which households should be receiving aid. A new constitution, passed just five months after the earthquake, sped up the process of governmental decentralisation but led to further confusion as local authorities were not always clear about their roles, which made coordination difficult.

To help address these challenges, one DEC member charity organised monthly meetings among international aid organisations to find solutions to common issues and ways to work collectively with the Government to manage humanitarian assistance effectively. In Kathmandu, DEC member charities met together on a regular basis to share lessons from their experiences, providing a welcome space to seek advice and offer guidance.

## New approaches

New and innovative approaches to recovery were introduced by DEC member charities. In one area, satellite imagery was used to show communities a bird's-eye view of the new water

infrastructure being installed, including the location of the source, reservoir tank and the pipelines to each household. This meant that local people had far greater ownership of the waterworks and also increased the transparency around who was benefitting from the system.

Videos were produced on earthquake-safe building construction techniques, which contain guidance on how to ensure homes meet government standards and so qualify for funding for reconstruction. Feedback showed that people found the videos engaging, useful and convenient. They were played on tablets during door-to-door visits to provide assistance with construction and were transferred to people's smartphones when possible.

Two DEC members charities introduced an environmentally friendly technology to produce locally made bricks for house reconstruction. This eliminated the cost of transporting materials and created jobs. These bricks do not require firewood to dry and therefore help discourage deforestation. They are also fully tested as a suitable material to build earthquake-resistant structures. Initially, people were reluctant to use them as they had never seen them before, but with clear information and education on the benefits of the bricks, they were soon accepted as a major construction material.



# KEY CHALLENGES AND RISKS

## Political restructuring

Nepal saw an immense amount of political change in the months and years following the earthquake, which had a marked impact on the progress of recovery. The landmark constitution passed in September 2015 led to massive protests, due to the new administrative boundaries which minority groups along the border with India claimed are discriminatory. Landlocked Nepal is highly dependent on imports from India and so when goods trucks stopped crossing the border due to the protests, fuel rationing was imposed by the Government of Nepal.<sup>15</sup> This had huge repercussions on the disaster response, delaying reconstruction efforts, as DEC members and other charities were forced to reduce their work due to a lack of fuel. This occurred at a crucial time, when DEC member charities were particularly concerned to see affected people safely housed in repaired homes before Nepal's brutal winter set in. Fuel rationing was lifted five months later in February 2016.

In the spring of 2017, local elections took place for the first time in 20 years. Out of fear that gatherings could be misused for campaign purposes, the local government announced in early April that no public events could be held until after the elections. This meant that aid distributions such as cash grants had to be suspended, further impacting and delaying recovery from the earthquake.

## Monsoons

The annual monsoon season impacted heavily on the earthquake response, bringing with it landslides and flooding which blocked roads, preventing travel to some areas and halting reconstruction. In 2017, the monsoon season saw extreme flooding in parts of Nepal, the worst for many years, causing deaths and requiring further emergency efforts.

## Reconstruction

Progress on reconstructing shelters has been slower than expected. Of the 767,705 houses destroyed by the earthquake and eligible for reconstruction grants, just over 160,000 homes had been completely rebuilt and about 350,000 were under construction by August 2018, according to the NRA.<sup>16</sup> As of end April 2018, 91% of houses in need of repair have signed agreements with the Government of Nepal to receive grants for reconstruction, in line with standards on more resilient construction; 89% have received the first tranche of money, 34% have received the second tranche, and only 9% have received the third tranche.<sup>17</sup> This slow progress is due to extensive delays in the establishment of the NRA (see page 3). Further delays ensued because of the need to verify that each house reconstruction met NRA standards, the scarcity of qualified construction workers and the increased cost of construction materials (cement, steel bars, gravel). The severity of the earthquake, the remote terrain of many affected communities, debilitating monsoons and political repercussions meant that expectations of what could be achieved in three and a half years need to be tempered, yet progress has been frustratingly slow. As confirmed by the independent response review and independent evaluations, DEC member charities worked effectively within these constraints, training local people as masons and carpenters and ensuring families had support and guidance to meet government standards for reconstruction.

## Working with local partners

Despite the many advantages and ethical benefits of working through local partners, an independent review of the first three months of the DEC response<sup>18</sup> found that a number of challenges existed in these relationships. Where new partnerships were forged, it was often a challenge for DEC members to find local organisations with the required capacities to organise emergency relief distribution in a short period of time

at the scale required. Similarly, pre-existing partners often had to rapidly broaden their mandate and geographic reach to respond to the earthquake, which could be very demanding and stressful. For example, one partner who had a mandate to work in education before the earthquake then switched to providing psychosocial support to respond to the immediate needs of their local community. However, they were not initially qualified to provide this type of support and consequently, efforts at the beginning were largely superficial.

Another issue was the political affiliation of local organisations. The vast majority of NGOs in Nepal are affiliated to a particular political party, which has meant that a high level of scrutiny and care was needed in choosing and managing activities to guard against apparent partiality. To mitigate this challenge, one DEC member charity conducted a series of meetings with their partner to discuss humanitarian aid principles and ensure that project locations were selected based on assessments of people's needs and recommendations from local government authorities.



# LESSONS LEARNED

Taking time to reflect on and evaluate the earthquake response has been crucial in order to learn from experience and adjust ongoing activities to better meet people's evolving needs. An independent review of the first three months provided concrete recommendations from affected people for DEC member charities to take on board in the subsequent months, ensuring coherent and informed strategies from all members.<sup>19</sup> This review highlighted the need for DEC member charities to support the training of local masons, plumbers and carpenters and provide guidance on reconstruction, rather than take on the task of building homes themselves. This was an approach adopted across the DEC response. It also raised the issue of women initially feeling side-lined by recovery efforts, something member charities went on to address through activities that took into account their specific needs and aimed at their empowerment.

Another key message from the review was that DEC member charities should use the response as an opportunity to advocate for the Government of Nepal to prepare for the next big disaster. This was seen in many disaster risk management plans that DEC members developed in collaboration with local authorities and civil society organisations. Evaluations carried out later in the response by DEC member charities found that they had made a significant difference to the recovery and resilience of earthquake-affected communities. However, they also raised concerns about the effectiveness of disaster risk reduction plans, given the turnover in local authorities following decentralisation and local elections. This, along with the large number of people still without secure, permanent homes, poses a challenge to DEC member charities, many of whom remain working in Nepal and continue to seek out further funding to provide ongoing support.

## DEC LEARNING EVENT

In February 2017, almost two years after the earthquake, the DEC held a learning forum in Kathmandu for member charities and their partners, with the objective of sharing and discussing the most important lessons so far from their work in responding to the earthquake. Presentations, panel discussions and breakout sessions took place examining pertinent themes of coordination, accountability and 'build back safer'. It was also an opportunity to network and build relationships between peers. Key lessons from this forum include:

- the need to shift people's mindsets to think about long-term rather than short-term needs
- the need for greater flexibility to change the type of aid given in response to people's evolving needs.

## ACTION RESEARCH

Throughout the summer of 2017, two DEC member charities joined together to carry out 'action research' (a study carried out in the course of the response activity) aided by Coventry University. The action research examined the extent to which efforts to enable communities to make decisions about how aid money was used led to greater inclusion of marginalised groups and improved accountability. Findings from the study showed that challenges such as political influence, errors, geographical distances, and documentation meant that not all of those who should have received assistance did so.

Despite this, the study showed a high level of agreement between aid organisations and community perspectives on who should be prioritised to receive aid.



# THE TASK AHEAD

The Government of Nepal has set deadlines for households to complete ground-floor-level construction by mid-July 2018, and roof-level construction by mid-January 2019, in order to access the next tranches of funding. While this has provided a strong incentive for households to speed up reconstruction, it has also pressured many families into taking out high-interest loans to cover additional construction expenses (government grants are inadequate to meet all costs), which can have a serious impact in terms of debt.<sup>20</sup> Alternatively, some families have concentrated on rebuilding one-room houses in order to meet government deadlines and receive the subsidy. These tiny houses are often unable to meet the spatial needs of rural households, in terms of room to store crops, livestock and tools.<sup>21</sup>

This mixed picture of recovery brings home the sheer challenge of responding

to a disaster of this size in a country where poverty, inequality and political upheaval are daily realities. What DEC member charities have been able to do in these circumstances with DEC appeal funds is help build the foundations for a more resilient society; one where people now have the skills and knowledge to reconstruct their homes and communities in a way that will stand up to future earthquakes and shocks. Resilience has also been built in many other ways: through activities to empower children, women, senior citizens, and marginalised groups, DEC member charities have initiated processes that have the potential to lead to a transformation of the structures and systems that enforce poverty and inequality. While there still remains work to be done, three years after the earthquake, Nepal is now far more prepared for future disasters.



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# HOW THE DEC WORKS

The DEC brings together some of the UK's leading charities to raise funds at times of significant humanitarian need overseas. It allocates appeal funds to its members and ensures that the generous donations of the UK public are spent on emergency aid needed by communities devastated by humanitarian crises, as well as on longer-term support to rebuild the lives of people in these communities. Donating through the DEC is simple and effective. It removes unnecessary competition for funding between aid charities and reduces administration costs.



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