

# People's Experiences and Perspectives on Recovery from the 2015 Earthquakes in Nepal



A Reality Check Approach Report

March 2016



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**Cover image:** The RCA team, Nepal

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Most importantly, this study was only possible thanks to the many families, their neighbours and communities who shared their lives with our researchers for a short while. We are grateful to them for this opportunity, and for openly sharing their lives, activities, perspectives and aspirations, especially at this difficult time. We hope that the report reflects well their views and experiences and lessons can be learned from this for future relief and reconstruction efforts.

# Acronyms and Glossary

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CDO	Community Development Officer
CGI	Corrugated Galvanised Iron
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)
DFID	Department for International Development
HHH	Host Household
Lakh	One Hundred Thousand Nepalese Rupees
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
NPR	Nepalese Rupees
RCA	Reality Check Approach
VDC	Village Development Committee

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## Currency Exchange Rate

As at January 2016, Nepalese Rupee (NPR) 100 = £0.65 pounds sterling

# Executive Summary

This Reality Check Approach (RCA) Study was undertaken over November and December, 2015. The Nepal RCA team was by the Department for International Development (DFID) through Palladium to provide insights into people's experiences of the earthquakes and their consequences in order to contribute to learning lessons for the future. Specifically, it seeks to understand the perspectives of those directly affected by the earthquakes themselves – especially families living in poverty, and presents their perspectives as they continue to make sense of what has occurred.

At 11:56am on 25 April 2015, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake hit central Nepal, with its epicentre in Barpak, Gorkha. In 45 seconds the earthquake is estimated to have killed over 8,600 people, injured more than 23,000 and damaged nearly 1 million homes. On 12 May 2015 a second earthquake measuring 7.3 with its epicentre near the border with China shook an already traumatised Nepal, killing a further 200 people. Hundreds of aftershocks followed both events, some of which were quite large, compounding the damage wrought through further landslides.

The Reality Check Approach is an internationally recognised qualitative research approach that involves researchers staying in the homes of study participants for several days and nights, using this opportunity to interact informally with members of these communities. This approach encourages informal and ordinary interactions and builds trusted relations for open dialogue. It also provides opportunities for the study team to triangulate conversations with their own first-hand experiences and observations.

The study took place in six locations within the fourteen earthquake affected districts of Nepal. These locations were purposively selected to include rural, peri-urban and urban locations which had been directly affected by the earthquakes. The study intended to include families who remained in their localities as well as those who were displaced as a result of the disaster. Locations included Kathmandu, Dhading and Gorkha. The study team members lived with a total of seventeen households for three to four days and nights. More than 700 others, including the household neighbours, local service providers and police were engaged in informal conversations around their experiences of the earthquakes and aftermaths during the course of the study.

People remembered the shaking, rumbling noises, dust, darkness and were overcome with feelings of panic as the first earthquake hit. People discussed knowing that Nepal is earthquake prone, but were still ill prepared. Those in rural areas ran outside of their homes when the earthquake hit, whilst those in Kathmandu felt safer to remain inside. Many shared that it was fortunate that the first (and more destructive) earthquake hit during the day and at a weekend as many, especially in the rural areas, were outside their homes and children were not at school. Two of our rural study locations had suffered many deaths but most of these had been a result of landslides triggered by the earthquakes, rather than from collapsing buildings. In one location, people were relieved that there was a power cut at the time *'otherwise children would have been inside watching TV'*.

The study purposively selected areas which suffered significant damage. Researchers found that many houses, especially old stone and mud houses had collapsed at the time of the earthquake, often destroying grain stores within. As well as completely destroyed houses and public infrastructure, such as roads, schools, health centres and power plants, many buildings were significantly damaged. People found it hard to explain why some buildings, made of the same materials and in the same locality, remain unscathed. Two of the study locations have been declared *'no habitation zones'* and people are supposed to have been relocated.

April is a key agricultural month and migrant workers in India often return at this time to provide extra hands for harvesting the winter crops and planting the summer crops. People shared that few crops were lost directly as a consequence of the earthquakes (although some in the mountainous areas were lost due to landslides) but neglect following the disaster led to lower crop yields. Poorer quality storage conditions

following the earthquakes, people said, led to considerable damage from rats. A bigger impact was felt by those whose livelihoods depend on livestock raising, especially in Upper Gorkha and Upper Dhading. People said livestock numbers were reduced by 80-90%, mostly as a result of being caught in landslides. Subsequent stress, livestock owners told us, reduced milk production.

People across locations were critical of the rescue efforts, although the remote Upper Gorkha location had helicopters offering assistance on the same afternoon as the earthquake. Searching for people under rubble was left to neighbours who were scared and ill-equipped. Police were criticised for not coming at all or coming really late (in one study village, they did not come for two months). The police told us they too were traumatised, concerned for their own families, and that their police stations and communications equipment had often been destroyed, making them unable to respond. Furthermore, they felt under-staffed and under-supported. Police were on the scene on the day of the earthquake in Kathmandu itself and in our peri-urban location but people felt they were mostly ineffective. The army was not in evidence at all in any of the locations during the rescue period. Medical help also came several days later across all study locations, except in Kathmandu. Here, despite what they described as huge efforts, health staff themselves said it was chaotic, disorganised and severely hampered by people's unwillingness to re-enter damaged health facilities. Early food drops from helicopters were criticised for being unnecessary and being done too hastily so that bags of food burst on impact and were unusable.

People told us across all locations that their immediate concerns after the earthquake were for family members. The fact that mobile phone networks were down for many hours compounded their anxieties. The next concern was for immediate shelter, and families opted to make temporary shelters in the open using lightweight materials or staying in animal sheds. They gathered together in family and caste/ethnic groups to provide emotional support. Food, people said, was not the issue as stocks were salvageable and local shops continued to trade. Most people said they had sufficient cash (before the Government cash transfer scheme started) to ensure they could buy food if needed. Food prices rose significantly in Kathmandu but less so outside of the capital.

People said that very little aid arrived until after the second earthquake (mid-May). People said they found the Government cash transfer the most consistently useful aid but they did not get this until June. Mostly, people told us it was used to make improvements to their temporary shelters. The cash was automatically provided to those who had been given victim cards but the process for getting these cards varied considerably. In some areas these were issued to all households without physical examination of damage caused to their house. In some areas only one card was issued to each household regardless of the size of the household whereas, in others, separate families living in a single house all received their own cards. Some people openly shared that they feigned their circumstances to get extra cards by claiming second homes as their main residence and claiming sons and daughters lived with them when they did not. Some missed out on getting cards because they were away from home when assessments were done and found it difficult to undertake the processes of redress. Those in rented accommodation in Kathmandu found they got no cash handouts, even though they had lost assets because they did not own the property. Others shared that there were administrative errors on the documents and wondered how this would affect their entitlements in the future.

People said CGI sheets arrived mostly '*too late*'. People said they would have used these if they had arrived earlier (especially as monsoon season approached) and although some have subsequently incorporated them in their shelters, there are many bundles of CGI sheets left unused in all locations. Other aid items included rice, lentils, cooking utensils and blankets. People felt these '*just came*' with little consultation as to what was needed. Some items, like the tinned sardines from the United Kingdom, were criticised (described as '*disgusting*') and thrown away. Other examples include thin cooking pots not suitable for wood fires which burned through quickly, water purifiers that were too complicated to use, water purifying liquid that tasted bad, toothbrushes, shaving kits, spoons and butter knives (all considered unnecessary), thin and small



blankets and poor quality thin tarpaulins. Feeding programmes failed to recognise cultural norms around mourning, such as not eating salt for thirteen days following a death in the family.

In all study locations, people shared that the distribution process was not clear. Members of the all-party relief committees shared that distribution was '*haphazard*'. Information was either unavailable locally or purposely withheld. People said that radio announcements of aid provisions often fuelled jealousy or speculation of corruption among those who had not received it. Various organisations shared with us that their assessments of need had been subjective and this inevitably fuelled suspicion and rumours that only those with connections, '*clever people*' or members of the aid-giving organisation or religion benefitted. Minorities such as Dalits complained that they were singled out for benefits when others deserved it more. As well as lack of information on entitlements, people shared that they had to collect the aid themselves which often entailed long treks and payment for transportation. The elderly and mothers on their own with small children particularly shared that they found this difficult. Nowhere were there working procedures for complaints and redress.

Cost of labour increased soon after the earthquakes. People said this was because people were unwilling to work in demolition or transport where risks of injury were considered too high. The shortage of labour also reflects the general reduction in number of young men in villages due to international migration for work. Another reason shared was the inflated labour wages being provided by relief and aid organisations, notably international NGOs. People complained these were often twice the usual daily rate making it impossible to employ workers to work at the former rates.

School closures lasted between one and five months in the study locations, but some families talked about their children having extremely long journeys to attend undamaged schools whilst others had decided to board away from home.

Nine months on, people had mostly resumed their livelihoods, although some working in construction and tourism told us they continue to struggle. There did not seem to be an increase in those wanting to work abroad although some shared that their families were now more supportive of the idea. This is a trend that had been increasing rapidly before the quakes anyway. Those who are living in resettlement areas say they are finding it difficult to get work locally but, at the same time, say they have little desire to move on as their needs are met through continuing relief. Many families have relatively good cash flows supported by remittance payments and in some cases this has meant that they have not gone back to farming. People said that borrowing and taking loans had not increased except by those with family members who were injured by the earthquake and needed medical attention.

Few are in a hurry to re-build their houses – this stems from a number of factors. Firstly people want to '*live without fear*' and feel temporary housing is safer. They also say '*losing a house is like losing one's life savings*' and the task of rebuilding seems daunting. Furthermore, 2072 (April 2015 - March 2016) is regarded as an inauspicious year. Other reasons shared for delaying reconstruction include; waiting for the NPR 2 lakhs promised by the Government for re-building, the shortage of labour, the escalation of labour costs, people are unsure about new building regulations (especially in the newly enlarged municipalities), people are unsure about what are the best (recommended) building designs and materials. Those with partially standing houses say that the costs to demolish are very high and some regret that their houses did not collapse completely, as it would have been cheaper to re-build from scratch. Only the communities which have retained old traditions of labour reciprocity have got on with the task of rebuilding, saying '*we did not want to wait for government*'. Older people shared that they do not have the emotional strength to rebuild as they had always envisaged old age in their old familiar homes.

Old people, in particular, told us they want their families to be together and find separation much harder since the earthquake. Others echo this saying that '*safety is being with family*'. The Dashain festival in

October spurred people on to affect some, mostly cosmetic, repairs to their houses and the onset of the cold season encouraged people to make enough repairs to move back into their homes if they could.

The appearance of resilience (people say they lived through the insurgency which, according to them, was far worse) may belie people's real vulnerability. Many say they are still scared and want to continue living outside. People said there had been some increased drinking of alcohol after the quakes, although it has levelled off a bit recently and is closer to pre-earthquake levels. Health staff told us they are prescribing more anti-depressants and seeing more people with anxiety and nervous disorders. Some told us that they had recorded higher than average numbers of miscarriages in the months following the earthquake.

Some youth say they have benefitted in that their ambitions to go abroad to work as their families view this as a better investment than they did before quakes. Those who have re-settled from very remote areas closer to towns shared that they like the opportunities this provides for access to school, shopping and entertainment. The elderly, on the other hand, said that they miss their villages, their homes and their old way of life and often shared they are '*waiting to die*'. People feel that the elderly were often the worst impacted physically, economically, socially and psychologically and have been the least able to recover from the disaster.

The report concludes with a discussion of the study implications, which include;

- People favourably compared the respectful and empathetic approach of the RCA methodology to other interactions they had with outsiders and researchers after the quakes.
- Having operational communications (especially mobile phone coverage) immediately after the disasters was considered vital as people's first concerns were always about affirming the safety of their family members.
- Community self-help efforts were most effective and people feel police were overstretched, ineffective, ill –prepared and ill-equipped.
- Food aid as an early response to the disaster was not needed. Rather tarpaulins and tools were needed more. People feel that two way communication so that real needs are responded to, even in the early response period, is essential.
- While the cash transfer scheme for victims was seen as simple and appreciated, there were concerns about eligibility. People suggested a fairer system would take into account the number of people living together as a family and the level of destruction of productive assets and food stocks rather than focusing on the destruction of the house.
- People feel that more culturally appropriate and timely relief is required. Care not to distort the local economy is needed especially for local retailers and construction workers. Greater care is also needed, people say, not to create long term dependency on relief aid.
- People felt there had been insufficient attention to the needs of the elderly, especially as many live on their own with their sons and daughters living abroad or away from the village.
- People need clear simple advice on earthquake resilient reconstruction and the new building regulations and availability of re-construction loans.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Acronyms and Glossary.....	iii
Currency Exchange Rate.....	iii
Table of Contents .....	i
Introduction and Methodology .....	3
Introduction .....	2
Study Methodology .....	2
Study Locations .....	3
Study Participants .....	4
Study Process.....	5
Ethical Considerations .....	6
Study Limitations .....	7
Context.....	9
Our study families .....	12
When the Earthquake Hit.....	16
Immediate Effects .....	17
On people .....	19
On buildings and infrastructure.....	20
On livestock and land .....	22
Immediate Reactions .....	23
Relief.....	31
Recovery.....	37
Coping.....	43
People’s Expectations .....	54
Government of Nepal’s commitment to Reconstruction .....	54
People’s immediate and long term plans.....	55
Study Implications.....	58
Annexes .....	60
Annex I: Areas of Conversation .....	61
Annex II: Research Team .....	62
Annex III: List of people met .....	633

# Tables

Table 1: Study Locations .....	4
Table 2: Education levels and source of livelihoods for parents in host households .....	12
Table 3: Most significant change following the earthquakes by HHH .....	13
Table 4: People's perceptions of the effects of the earthquakes.....	18
Table 5: Structures HHH were living in at time of study .....	25
Table 6: Daily labour rates for construction before and after the earthquake .....	51

# Introduction and Methodology

01

# Introduction

At 11:56am on 25 April 2015, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake hit central Nepal, with its epicentre in Barpak, Gorkha. In 45 seconds the earthquake is estimated to have killed over 8,600 people, injured more than 23,000 and damaged nearly 1 million homes. On 12 May 2015 a second earthquake measuring 7.3 with its epicentre near the border with China shook an already traumatised Nepal, killing a further 200 people. Hundreds of aftershocks followed both events, some of which were quite large, compounding the damage wrought through further landslides.

Since the first earthquake, over USD4.1 billion in foreign aid has been pledged to support recovery efforts. The Government of Nepal has established a number of schemes to support those affected, particularly with cash transfers which are intended to cover immediate food needs, reconstruction and winter clothing. Nepali and international organisations, both secular and religious, have raised funds and provided relief directly in thousands of communities. Over 200 days had passed between the first quake and the time researchers visited the study communities, but the work of recovery had only just begun.

This Reality Check Approach was commissioned by DFID to better understand people's experiences since the earthquake. The study provides insights into the impact of these events from the perspectives of those who survived. Spending considerable time with people and learning about them, their context and their response to the events has provided important insights into the catastrophe. The study explores the experiences of ordinary people and this report intends to present their perspectives as they continue to make sense of what has occurred. The fact that both researchers and those they stayed with during the study had shared this 'same 45 seconds' provided a common basis for connection that helped navigate what may have otherwise been an insurmountably difficult and sensitive topic.

## Study Methodology

The Reality Check Approach (RCA) is a qualitative methodological approach in which trained researchers gather in-depth qualitative data through a multi-night immersion, open conversations and participant observations. This informal approach provides a context that enables the researcher to gain insights into the realities faced by the families with whom they stay, as well as their neighbours and members of the wider community. The main idea is to have sustained, detailed conversations and intense interactions with a small number of households in their own homes, as well as their neighbours and others they come in contact with during the stay. Sharing in their lives provides opportunities to better understand and contextualise people's opinions, experiences and perspectives.

RCA extends the tradition of listening studies (Salmen 1998 and Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012) and beneficiary assessments by combining elements of these approaches with researchers actually living with people whose views are being sought, usually those who are directly experiencing the issue under study.

RCA is sometimes likened to a "light touch" participant observation. The participant observation method involves entering the lives of the subjects being researched and both participating in and observing their normal everyday activities and interactions. It usually entails extensive and detailed research into behaviour with a view to understanding peoples' perceptions and their actions over long periods of time. The RCA is similar in that it requires participation in everyday life within people's own environments but differs by being comparatively quick and placing more emphasis on informal, relaxed and insightful conversations than on observing behaviour and the complexities of relationships.

Important characteristics of the RCA are:

- Living with rather than visiting (thereby meeting the family in their own environment, understanding family dynamics, how days and nights are spent);
- Having conversations rather than interviews (there is no note taking thereby putting people at ease and on an equal footing with the outsider);
- Learning rather than finding out (suspending judgement, letting people who experience of the issue take the lead in defining the agenda and what is important);
- Being household-centred, interacting with families rather than users, communities, groups;
- Being experiential in that researchers themselves take part in daily activities (e.g. collecting water, cooking, cultivation, etc.), accompany household members (to school, to market, etc.);
- Ensuring inclusion of all members of households;
- Interacting in private space rather than public space (an emphasis on normal, ordinary lives);
- Embracing multiple realities rather than relying on public consensus (gathering diversity of opinion, including 'smaller voices');
- Interacting in ordinary interaction with frontline service providers (accompanying host household members in their interactions with local service providers, meeting service providers as they go about their usual routines);
- Taking a cross-sectoral view although each RCA study may have a special focus, the enquiry is situated within the context of everyday life rather than simply (and arguably artificially) looking at one aspect of people's lives.

## Study Locations

The study was undertaken in a total of six sites (three rural, two peri-urban and one urban) across three of the earthquake affected districts (Gorkha, Dhading and Kathmandu). The study was implemented at the VDC and municipality level in these districts. Locations for the study were purposefully selected based on following criteria:

Peri-urban and urban locations were selected based on the following criteria:

- Locations receiving high numbers of people displaced by the earthquake
- Locations particularly affected by the earthquake

Rural locations were selected based on the following criteria:

- Locations particularly affected by the earthquake
- Locations where previous research on earthquake funded by DFID has been implemented

The villages and towns are not named in this report in order to protect the identity and confidentiality of participants. Table 1 provides further information on the locations:

**TABLE 1: STUDY LOCATIONS**

<b>Location code</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Area</b>
G	Kathmandu valley	Peri-urban
B	Kathmandu city	Urban
K	Upper Gorkha	Rural
P	Lower Gorkha	Rural
M	Central Dhading	Rural
D1	Lower Dhading	Peri-urban (with local populations)
D2	Lower Dhading	Peri-urban (with populations displaced from upper Dhading)

Note: Researchers visited six locations; the Lower Dhading location is referred to as two separate locations in the above table; the original relief camp and the host community surrounding it.

## Study Participants

### Host Households

Unlike other RCA studies undertaken in Nepal, where the study team members have stayed with a range of families, this particular study required researchers to stay with earthquake affected households, where possible. Further, the understanding of a 'household' in this context was slightly different as many families were now living together under the same roof or in a temporary camps established especially for earthquake affected communities.

On arrival in the locations, researchers spent considerable time getting to know their communities and chatting informally with people they met, gradually involving them in helping to identify potential host households (HHH) with whom they might stay for the immersion. These HHH were selected with the view of meeting the following basic inclusion criteria:

In rural areas;

- ☐ All people should:
  - ☐ Be living in temporary shelters;
  - ☐ Be multi-generational families, particularly with children.

In peri-urban and urban areas;

- ☐ All people should:
  - ☐ Be living in temporary shelters;
  - ☐ Be multi-generational families, particularly with children.
- ☐ A portion of people should be:



- People who came to these areas as a result of the earthquake;
- People who lived in that area prior to the earthquake.
- As well as meeting the criteria detailed above, where possible, researchers stayed with HHH who were comparatively poorer to others in their community. The team stayed with a total of 17 host households.

Each HHH was situated at least 10-15 minutes walking distance from another researcher to allow each researcher to have their own conversations and community coverage to create the best conditions for further triangulation of findings. Most families were open to the approach and welcomed researchers into their homes, understanding the purpose of the study and the need for the researchers to not be afforded guest status. Through easy conversations and assisting with chores, the study team members were able to engage all members of the family.

The usual practice of providing a “gift” of food for each family on leaving to compensate for any costs incurred in hosting researchers was modified as most families had already received food items as part of the earthquake relief. To endorse researchers’ independence and avoid being associated with relief organisations, each team member decided to buy gifts as per the need of the host family (e.g. warm clothing). As researchers insist that no special arrangements are made for them, they helped in domestic activities and did not disturb income-earning activities, the actual costs to a family are negligible. The timing of the gift was important so families did not feel they were expected to provide better food for the researchers or get the impression that they were being paid for their participation.

## Neighbours and other Community Members

In addition to the seventeen host households, researchers interacted with neighbours and other members of the host communities. Using the same approach of informal conversations, the researchers interacted with HHH neighbours (focal households) through conversations. Opportunistic conversations were also undertaken with local service providers including police officers, teachers, shop owners, NGO staff, health workers and local political leaders (see Annex III for the list of people met). Overall, this study was based on the views of at least 723 people with whom the researchers interacted during immersion. In addition, the team interacted with at least a further 35 people during the two day urban insights study.

## Study Process

The study team comprised of 13 Nepali researchers, both experienced and new, who have undergone the full RCA training and were fully briefed on the scope of this study. Teams of three researchers stayed in each rural site, while for the urban study, the team comprised four researchers since the catchment areas in the urban sites were much larger.

Researchers worked collaboratively on the areas for conversations to guide conversations with households and their neighbours. RCA is not a theory-based research method although it often generates people’s theories of change and contributes to grounded theory approaches. Rather than using predetermined research questions which can suffer from normative bias, researchers use broad thematic checklists of areas of conversation. This also allows the researchers to build on progressive series of conversations. As part of the briefing process for researchers, areas for conversations were developed to act as a guide to ensure conversations were purposive. These areas for conversation are provided in Annex I, and intended to stimulate conversations around the perspectives, experience, relevance and appropriateness of interventions from the perspectives of earthquake affected people. Also intending to provide important insights into the context and underlying assumptions, it covered the following topics:

- ❏ **HHH Context (both before and after the earthquakes):** Family and village context, social dynamics, assets and livelihood status;
- ❏ **Experience of the earthquake:** Their story, response, perceptions and explanations of why it happened, relief and emergency services in the beginning;
- ❏ **Coping and adaptation (at family and community level):** Changes/disruptions in family life, living situation, adaptation to new circumstances, physical, emotional, psychological changes; social changes and dynamics, new relationships and challenges;
- ❏ **Current Living:** Access to cash, food, market, loans; family support and communication; Work opportunities, Fairness of work opportunities, Loss of main breadwinner, emergence of care needs;
- ❏ **Safety and security:** Disputes, theft, protection and exposure, trafficking; safety and security outside the home, who is at risk;
- ❏ **Experience of aid/relief:** Own experiences, expectations; organisations providing aid; fairness, adequacy and timeliness of aid, grievance mechanisms, transparency of provisions;
- ❏ **Aspirations and Perceptions:** Best form of future support, lessons learned and concerns and preparation for future.

The team members engaged with family members and others at appropriate times on these issues.

In all areas except urban Kathmandu, researchers intended to stay four nights and four days with their households but in some cases where travel time was longer, researchers could only spend three nights and four days as they needed to enter the community during daylight hours.

All researchers entered communities on foot in order to keep their arrival low key. During conversations and 'hanging out' with people no notes were taken, although each team member kept their own field diaries discretely at other times. To illustrate the context of the village and the households, photos were taken with the consent of community and family members concerned.

In the urban Kathmandu study location, a different process was undertaken as overnight immersion was not possible and the population is more transient. Insights were gathered through a two-day sense making activity. This involved spending extended periods of time with service providers, businesses and members of the public, rather than living with a host household. The first day largely focused on scoping, to understand the dynamics and population living in the area of interest. This exercise identified service providers as a useful entry point for learning more about the area and the experiences of its inhabitants with the earthquake. The second day then focused on having in-depth conversations with service providers and the people living around them.

Detailed and intensive one-day debriefing sessions were held with each sub-team as soon as possible after each round of the study was completed. These were led by the study team leader and provided an important opportunity to further triangulate findings. These de-briefings were captured in rich note form and comprised the core documentation for this study.

## Ethical Considerations

Like most ethnographic based research, in RCA studies there is no intervention involved. The study can be viewed as a way to empower the study participants in that they are able to express themselves freely in their

own space. Researchers are not covert but become 'detached insiders'. As per the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics, RCA adopts an ethical obligation to people 'which (when necessary) supersedes the goal of seeking new knowledge'. Researchers 'do everything in their power to ensure that research does not harm the safety, dignity or privacy of the people with whom they conduct the research'. All researchers are briefed on ethical considerations and Child Protection Policies before every field visit (irrespective of whether they have previously gone through this). All researchers sign Risk and Child Protection Policy declarations as part of their contracts.

All data (written and visual) is coded to protect the identity of individuals, their families and communities. As a result the exact locations and identities of households and others are not revealed in this report. Further, faces of householders and images which reveal the location are either not retained in the photo archive or identities are digitally removed. This is partly to respect good research practice with regard to confidentiality but also has the benefit of ensuring that no special measures or consideration are given to these locations or households in the course of the programme. All families are asked to give their consent for their stories and photos to be recorded and shared.

## Study Limitations

As with other research methods, this study has a number of limitations. This section provides an overview of these limitations, first as related to the study approach in general, and second as related to the particular circumstances of this study.

First, researchers select HHH based on both the purposive sampling criteria, as well as the extent to which the HHH was open to accommodating an outsider. This is determined through initial discussions, often with a number of households in the village, to identify HHH that meet these criteria. However, households that are more engaged or open with our researchers may be more socially active, educated, or less marginalised. The study team specifically considered this potential bias when both selecting households as well as throughout their stay. This bias was further mitigated through the duration of each stay, as researchers came into contact with a number of neighbouring households as well as other community members, allowing them to explore areas of conversation with them.

Another potential limitation to this study is researcher bias in recollection during the debriefing process. Inevitably the study team members will tend to interpret conversations, experiences and observations made during fieldwork based depending on personal bias and viewpoints. Though this limitation applies to all qualitative research, the research team mitigated this bias in a number of ways. First, by providing the study team with minimal information on IP-SSJ goals and activities which allowed them to explore the areas for conversation openly and without programme bias. Similarly, the structured debriefing process for both teams as well as all researchers encouraged them to reflect on these biases, and to triangulate their findings with those of other teams.

In addition, there are also a number of limitations for this study in particular. For example, research teams found it more difficult than in other RCAs to find households that had the capacity to house them. This is due primarily to the fact that most people in the locations of interest were living in temporary shelters. As such, teams spent more time than anticipated identifying a suitable household, in some cases having to reduce the number of nights of immersion to three rather than the standard four nights. In less remote locations where overall damage from the earthquake was more sporadic, populations with significant damage to their homes were often living together, but sometimes required more time than anticipated to locate. Although teams managed to gather significant insights into the circumstances facing their host households and communities during this time, this difficulty did mean that they had less time than is typical for an RCA to gather these insights.

It should also be noted that a number of teams faced language difficulties when interacting with their host communities. Though RCA teams are generally composed of researchers and translators capable of communicating in the language spoken by most people in their focal location, the disparate nature of displacement caused by the earthquake made it particularly difficult to anticipate these needs. Though researchers were able to communicate with their hosts to a large extent, their lack of facility in languages like Gurung inhibited their ability to establish a strong rapport with community members, which may have limited the depth of information they were able to gather.

Lastly, the fact that the study was implemented differently in the urban Kathmandu locations as compared with other locations provides some limitations for data collected in this area. This was required as this urban area, particularly following the earthquake, was composed of a high proportion of displaced and transient populations, many of whom were not interested in engaging with our researchers on a long-term basis. This was further complicated by the fact that many individuals were still living in severely damaged buildings, deemed unsafe for our researchers to spend extended amounts of time in. As a result of engaging extensively with key urban populations, service providers in particular, our researchers were still able to gain significant insights into these areas and populations.

**Context**

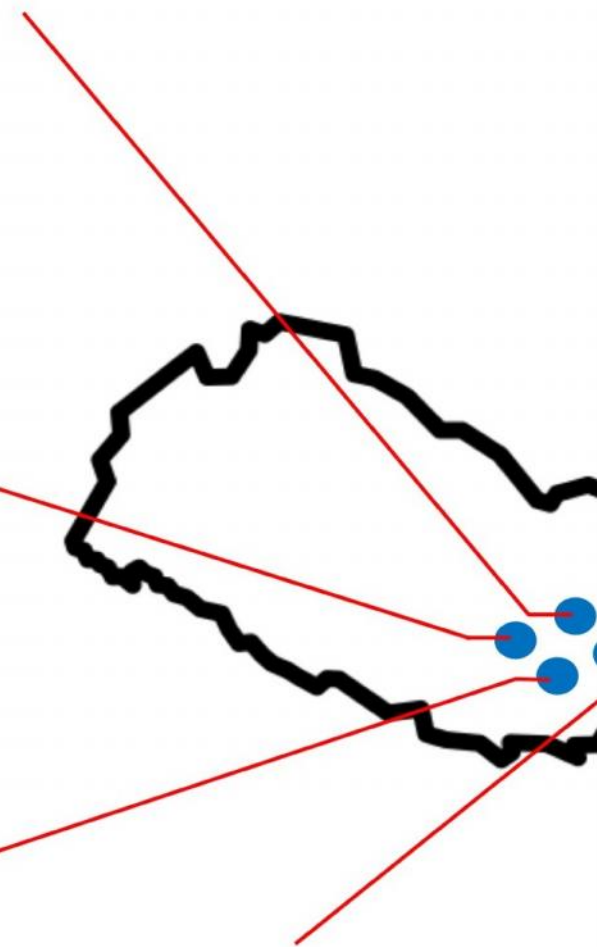
02

This study is based on the experiences of researchers who stayed with 17 host households (HHH) and conversations with over 700 people in six earthquake affected locations.

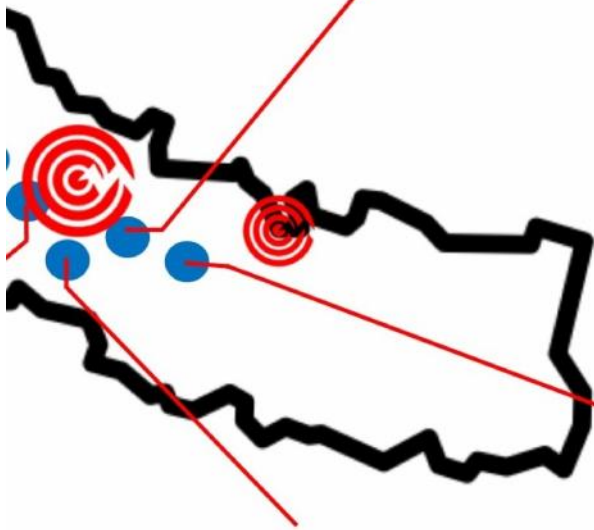
Description	Impact
The Upper Dhading location from where the relocated people come is located in the high mountains near the Tibetan border. People said the village had 200-250 households and had a high proportion of Tamangs who converted to Christianity many years ago. People said that they were largely subsistence farmers and raised livestock for a	'Many' people died in landslides – at least 20+ - along with high proportions of livestock. All buildings crumbled in the village and the trails and roads were severely damaged.

Description	Impact
Central Dhading location is approximately two hours walk from a large market center and has recently been incorporated into a municipality. The community is mostly Chhetris, Dalits and Newar residents. People here live in a combination of modern concrete houses and traditional houses made of mud and stone.  People here are largely subsistence farmers and raise some livestock. There is a primary school and health post within 20 minutes walking.	No one was killed in the quake, although most structures, particularly traditional mud homes with balconies, collapsed. Many structures also collapsed in the market centre, though many had been rebuilt. The school collapsed and classes are taking place in a temporary structure.  Most people are living in temporary shelters made of CGI. They are confused about the rules for rebuilding now that are part of a municipality, as they know there are additional regulations.

Description	Impact
The lower Dhading location is about 30 minutes walk from a market centre with a paved road, and could be described as 'peri-urban.' Comprising about 100 households, houses are primarily concrete and wood. This area had recently become a municipality and is home to a mixed community of Brahmins and Newars.	About half the houses here collapsed, though many others that are still standing are damaged. The school was damaged and following the earthquake there has been an extreme water shortage.  However, over 200 people from upper Dhading have been relocated to public land on the edge of this community. These people are living in temporary shelters in two settlements. The majority were Tamang.



Description	Impact
Upper Gorka location has approximately 90 households and is in the remote hills, over a day's walk from the nearest market town. People largely depend on livestock and tourism for their livelihood, and otherwise farm for their own consumption.  People here are Gurung but never converted to Christianity. They depended on a micro-hydro installations for their electricity. The VDC office can be reached within 1.5 hours on foot. Though people there could access a primary school in the village, they often chose to send their children to study in other villages 4-5 hours walk away, as well as in other VDCs	The community lost 16 people mostly in landslides, which also led to the loss of 80-90% of people's livestock. All houses except two were destroyed in the earthquake and many people are now living in self-constructed temporary shelters. No change in livelihoods .  As the micro-hydro plant was destroyed, people are now without electricity. Many nearby trails have been damaged, making the walk to the nearest village longer and more dangerous. The primary school was destroyed; people now send their children to school in one village a few hours away for part of the year, and to another village for the rest of the year.



Description	Impact
<p>Kathmandu valley location, 30 minutes drive from the city, modern peri-urban community recently converted into a municipality. Most people live in concrete houses (some owned and some rented) and either have salaried jobs in Kathmandu or nearby factories, wage labour e.g. construction with small scale farming for own consumption with some vegetable sales. Recently, people have moved here from the city, Gorkha and Dhading. Some have chosen to live in shelters before the earthquake as an economical way to live. About 100 families live in the community, which is majority Brahmin, coexisting with smaller groups of Newars, Dalits and Tamangs. Here, people could reach a school, health post and police station within twenty minutes walk The Maoist, CPN-UML and Nepali Congress parties are all active here, but none was dominant.</p>	<p>Many houses were damaged (police data states over 1,100 were completely destroyed) so people now live in temporary shelters. These are local people as well as other displaced persons from Kathmandu. The shelters comprise walls which were still standing post earthquakes with CI sheet roofs or are bamboo structures with CI sheet roofs.</p> <p>No change in livelihoods since the earthquake.</p>

Description	Impact
<p>The community in Central Gorka includes Tamang Christians and Brahmins and Dalits. People here live in a combination of concrete modern houses and traditional wood houses. People here are mostly farmers (cultivating wheat, beans and millet) and raise buffalo to support themselves, though largely only for personal consumption.</p> <p>Both locations had a primary school and health post within 20 minutes walking.</p>	<p>Although no one was killed in the quake, most houses here were destroyed, primarily in the Tamang and Dalit community. All mud and stone houses were categorised as completely destroyed.</p> <p>Most people were living in temporary shelters made from plastic, bamboo and CI sheet.</p> <p>The health post collapsed and the primary school was damaged, though it was still being used for classes. There was some damage to the road, but it was not severe and was still passable by bus. There is no change in livelihoods.</p>

Description	Impact
<p>The Kathmandu urban location is the major buspark for long distance buses plying all over Nepal. Many domestic migrant workers live here in rented accommodation, along with some permanent residences on the peripheries of this area. It also has many guesthouses and hotels and squatter settlements which have existed for over 20 years. In addition to being a home to migrant workers waiting for papers to be processed, this area is also a centre for prostitution. People do not know each other very well and control is mainly in the hands of 'dons'.</p>	<p>Many multi-story apartments and guest houses collapsed as a result of the earthquake, large numbers of people have moved away from the area, including many who returned to their home districts outside of the Kathmandu Valley. Rubble remains, though much has been cleared away. Many people continue to live and work in buildings that are heavily damaged. People attribute the level destruction of this area to the intentional violation of building codes by owners who rent out their properties. Though some businesses have closed as a result of the quake, many others remain open or re-opened. Bus traffic remains high, bringing large numbers of people in and out of the city.</p>

# Our study families

Only two of our study families were living in houses that had no visible damage from the earthquake; both of these were in the Kathmandu Valley. Three families living in central Dhading were living in houses that had been significant damaged but had repaired. The remaining 12 families were living in temporary shelters, constructed from a combination of bamboo, plastic sheeting, tarpaulin and CGI.

Ten of our HHH were home to grandparents, parents and children. Agriculture and livestock rearing were the primary sources of income for ten families, particularly those living in more remote locations. Families living in peri-urban areas supported themselves largely by working as drivers or employees in shops and hotels. Two families depended entirely on money sent by family members abroad, while two other families used their remittance income to supplement the income from agriculture. In almost all cases, grandparents had not attended school but in all locations except Upper Gorkha, the parents had some level of education. In all households, all children under the age of 12 were attending school. Table 2 below illustrates the education levels of HHH in each location, along with their castes.

**TABLE 2: EDUCATION LEVELS AND SOURCE OF LIVELIHOODS FOR PARENTS IN HOST HOUSEHOLDS**

Parent's level of education					
Most Education <-----	----->				Least Education
KTM Valley	Central Dhading (M)	Lower Dhading (D1)	Lower Gorkha (P)	Upper Dhading (D2)	Upper Gorkha (K)
Public servants Construction Truck driver Agriculture	Agriculture Remittances	Agriculture Trader	Agriculture Remittances	Livestock Agriculture	Agriculture Waged labour Remittances Police
Brahmin	Brahmin, Magar	Newar	Newar, Dalit	Tamang, Ghale	Gurung

All HHH had access to basic amenities, including toilets and electricity. While most HHH accessed electricity through the grid, families in upper Gorkha and upper Dhading utilised a micro-hydro plant and/or solar panels to facilitate this.

People's assets varied significantly across locations. In upper Gorkha and Dhading, people's main asset was their livestock. Nearly all HHH had mobile phones, with many having 2-3 per household. All HHH in KTM valley and in lower Gorkha had TVs, as compared with only one HHH from each of the other locations who had a TV.

## RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS - SOME MISS OUT ON HELP

Most of us in Kathmandu had heard of the level of destruction in remote places and we were aware that the Government and many organisations had been supporting the earthquake victims in different ways. I knew about the NPR 15,000 given to the victims and also that many had received CGI sheets to make temporary shelters. I stayed with an elderly couple in Gorkha who were still living in damaged houses. Almost everyone in the village had a temporary shelter made out of the CGI sheets, but my household didn't. This shocked me as the house had only one wall left standing. 'My' granny was 75 and 'my' grandpa was 80. They had enough rice (enough for a year because they can't eat rice and prefer millet). But their son lived away and they were not able to build a temporary shelter for themselves. There was a serious shortage of labourers in the village (partly due to migration to other parts of the country). Seven months after the earthquake, their son was returning to help build the shelter for them. However, they were worried that



labour costs had escalated since the earthquake as some INGOs had given around NPR 1175 per day, more than twice the local rate of NPR 500. Because of this, my family were not able to make use of the relief from the government.

**Field Notes, Gorkha**

Table 3 below provides an overview of the most significant change for each HHH following the earthquake.

**TABLE 3: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE FOLLOWING THE EARTHQUAKES BY HHH**

Site	Code	Most significant changes
Peri-Urban KTM	G1	Home severely damaged – living in
	G2	No damage to home, no loss of assets or livestock
	G3	House collapsed, living in temporary shelters
	G4	House collapsed, living in temporary shelters, breadwinner waiting for hotel in Kathmandu to be repaired so can go back to work
Upper Gorkha	K1	House collapsed, living in a temporary shelter Oil mill for seeds not functional without electricity from microhydro, father had started drinking
	K2	9 oxen, 20 goats died, house collapsed but rebuilt
	K3	House collapsed but has been rebuilt, 2 cows, 64 goats died
Lower Dhading	D1	Home village flattened, village relocates, living in temporary shelter; no loss of assets or animals
	D2	Home village flattened, living in temporary shelter in lower Dhading; no loss of assets or animals
	D3	Home village flattened, living in temporary shelter in lower Dhading; no loss of assets or animals
	D4	Little damage to house, no loss of assets or animals, no need to relocate
Central Gorkha	P1	TV broken, living in temporary shelter
	P2	No loss of assets or animals, living in temporary shelter
	P3	Cupboard buried inside house, living in temporary shelter
Central Dhading	M1	No loss of assets or animals, living in temporary shelter
	M2	No loss of assets or animals, living in temporary shelter
	M3	No loss of assets or animals, house damaged but repaired

Codes: *Green – minimal damage/disruption to life; Orange – significant damage/disruption to life; Red – extreme damage/disruption to life*

# Illustrations of our study families

Meet just a few of the families we stayed with during the research....

## The elderly ones



In one HHH in upper Gorkha, an elderly Gurung couple was living by themselves in a temporary shelter. Only one wall of their home was still standing, around which the family built a temporary shelter. They have four daughters, all of whom are married and living away, with one working in Israel who has promised to send NPR 1 lakh to help rebuild their home along with the other money she sends to support them. Neither the husband nor wife had been to school, though their children had all attended some secondary school. As the husband is often ill, the wife does the

majority of the work, including tending to the crops they grow for their own use.

## The young family



In central Gorkha, researchers stayed with one Newar family, composed of a husband (38) and wife (30) who were sharing a temporary shelter, along with their son (12) and daughter (8) and the husband's father (80). The mud and stone house that they had built two years ago collapsed during the first shock. This structure cost 9lakhs to build, but the family doesn't know where they will be able to come up with money like this to rebuild in the future. The parents support the family by growing agriculture, though both had attended some Bachelors studies. Both children also attend school. Their parents worry about

how to get through the cold of the upcoming winter and planned to insulate their shelter with mud and additional bamboo mats.

## Ones left behind



In central Dhading, one HHH consisted of a Brahmin husband and wife living together, along with their daughter-in-law and granddaughter. They have five children, three of whom live in Kathmandu – two currently in school and one in the Army. One son is working in Malaysia and supports the family financially, along with another son who works as a driver in the nearest market town. Neither of the parents have ever been to school. However, all children have attended school and the two oldest have completed their SLC. The parents care for the household animals, but leave their land untilled as there is no one to help

them with the planting and can't afford to hire an ox. The family's house was severely damaged in the quakes, but the family repaired some parts with mud and installed a CGI roof, and has been living there for the past few months.

## The relief camp family



In lower Dhading, researchers stayed with one Tamang husband (65) and wife (66), both of whom had migrated from their home village in the mountains where everything had crumbled from the first shock. They were now living alongside others from their village in temporary shelters made from tarpaulin on an unoccupied plot of land, about 10 minutes from the local community and about 30 minutes from a large market town. Though the family depended largely on agriculture for their livelihood in their home village, they now relied on relief materials and benefits to cover their food and household needs. Neither

member of the couple had ever been to school, but their three sons, all of whom are married with separate

families, attended some primary. The couple said they converted to Christianity about twenty years prior when missionaries came to their village

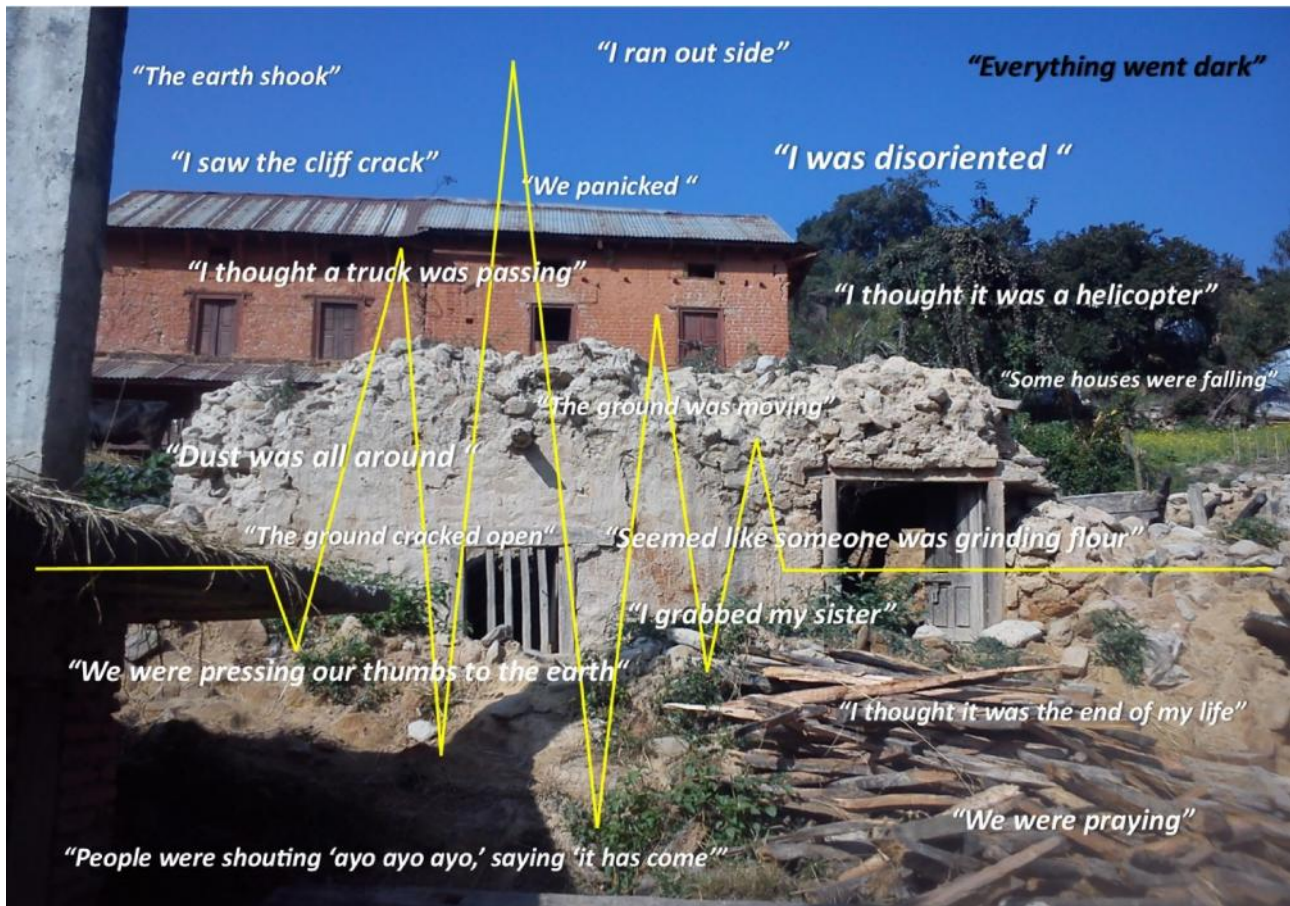
### **Peri-urban family**



In the Kathmandu Valley, a Brahmin family of eight people were living together in a temporary shelter made from bamboo, mud and CGI sheets. The husband (52) and wife (44) live with their three grown children. The father works in construction and is the vice chairman of the local CPN-UML committee, though supplemented his income by growing vegetables for personal consumption. The two sons (21 and 23) are at university in Kathmandu, while the daughter is working as a teacher (25). The father dropped out of his bachelor's studies, while the mother completed grade eight. Their house was two floors and made of

bricks and mud, though it was significantly damaged in the first earthquake. The youngest son has begun using the structure as a warm place to study, though his mother is worried that it will collapse.

# When the Earthquake Hit



People told us they immediately knew an earthquake was happening as they had felt them before or heard family members describe them. Most people described themselves as shocked and disoriented after the initial quake. They said that they know Nepal is earthquake prone and some shared religious or superstitious sentiments to explain the earthquake. Those that did (Hindu and Christian) indicated that the quake happened because there is more evil in the world, people have sinned and there is a need for prayer. The hundreds of aftershocks were particularly unsettling, one woman described this, saying **'this is not earthquake, this is demon. If this was earthquake, it would have stopped sooner as this was the devil, it hasn't stopped.'**

# Immediate Effects

03

*‘What do you do when the thing that you are supposed to hold on to collapses?’*

– Young girl in upper Gorkha

People spoke more passionately about the first earthquake than the second one. Though few people had ever received any formal instructions on what to do, a few said that they recalled seeing signs and posters warning them of the danger of earthquakes but knew little of the details. A girl in one of our families in upper Gorkha said she had been taught to hold onto the pillars supporting her house, but that these had crumbled. Most in the rural and peri-urban areas instinctively ran out of houses.

Table 4 below provides an overview of the conditions of the communities we visited.

**TABLE 4: PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTS OF THE EARTHQUAKES**

	Deaths	% of Houses Destroyed	Level of Road Access	Public Buildings Destroyed	Electricity	Water
Upper Dhading	'Many' – 20+ estimated	100%	Almost completely destroyed	School	No information	No information
Upper Gorkha (K)	16 estimated	95%	Significantly damaged	School	Micro hydro destroyed	Now only few taps working
Lower Gorkha (P)	0	Approx. 80% destroyed	Light damage to access road	School Health Post	Disrupted - lines and meters broken, people using those that are left	Not affected
Central Dhading (M)	0	Approx. 90% destroyed	Not affected	School	Not affected, use line from homes in shelters	Not affected
Lower Dhading (D)	0	Approx. 60% destroyed	Not affected	Minimal damage to school	Not disrupted for locals No electricity in settlements	Severe shortage
Kathmandu Valley (G)	2	Approx. 50% destroyed	Not affected	Minimal damage to school	Not affected, use line from homes in shelters	Not affected
Urban Kathmandu	100s	Approx. 50% destroyed	Jammed by rubble from buildings	Many schools destroyed	Not affected	Not affected

Based on the experiences of the specific communities we stayed with, who were worst affected *red= severe effect, orange = some effect, green =no effect*

In recounting their experiences of those early moments after the earthquake struck, they highlighted two things: the loss of human life and the physical impacts of their community.

# On people

In most locations, people told us that few in their community had lost their lives in either of the earthquakes. In some locations, no one had died. Many people attributed this to the fact that the quakes had occurred during the day, while rural people were outside working in their fields and tending to their animals. Those who were home said they were able to run out of doors, although in Kathmandu urban areas people indicated that lives had been saved because they remained inside and children were not in school.

Some people said they had been spared the worst because they lived on flat land. The converse of this was stark in Upper Gorkha, where many people recounted experiences of severe landslides minutes after the first earthquake began that by their estimate, killed, sixteen people. People told us that though some people had been crushed by the landslides, others were trapped underneath and between boulders. People concluded that these individuals *'must have died of starvation.'* Health workers explained that many bodies had been found without any physical injuries, fuelling this speculation. Unable to remove these bodies, burials and death rituals were performed in situ (see photo). The landslides had created so much damage that people were convinced it was the earthquake's epicentre (though it was not).

People from upper Dhading also told us that casualties were *'very high'* in their home village due to landslides that continued days after the earthquake. One man explained, *'many people were buried. We heard people but couldn't rescue them. There was no way to get there,'* said one father echoing others similar experiences. Another shared, *'the landslides were continuous and so many people died.'*



**Traditional ceremony for 16 people who died in Upper Gorkha**



**Damage to hills from landslides in Upper Gorkha**

'I visited the school which had been a six storied building but was now rubble. Everyone was pleased that the earthquake had happened on a Saturday so there had been no children inside when it collapsed. Classes are now held in tents and it is tough as it gets colder. Before there were over 800 students but now only 375. Many had seen the building collapse and did not want to go back.'

#### Field Notes, Kathmandu

'Many people were outside at the time of the earthquake. The electricity happened to be off so there were no children inside watching TV, they were all outside playing. This was so fortunate.'

#### Field Notes, Gorkha

Some, particularly the elderly, were injured while running from their homes or by falling debris. People in our study communities said that they were grateful that these injuries were relatively minor, as there was no immediate medical assistance available for several days. In remote upper Gorkha, one of our study household fathers explained the prevalence of minor injuries compared to major ones, as rescue help came too late (or not at all), *'whoever survived [the quake] did not have any injuries, and who ever had injuries did not survive.'*

While relatively few people across all rural areas suffered serious injuries, many mentioned that their family members in Kathmandu had either been injured, or that they had known many people who were injured. This was particularly true for people living in central Dhading, where the mother of one of our host households explained that three members of her family had been injured while staying in Kathmandu. One son, she explained had a broken leg and *'needed to have steel'* inserted, while another son broke his arm. Her daughter-in-law, she explained, wasn't physically injured *but 'has a mental problem'* as a result of the quake. The grandmother in the host household explained that *'she just keeps staring into space. She cries all the time and isn't acting normally.'*

## On buildings and infrastructure

Across all host communities, the majority of people we interacted with told us that their homes were *'completely destroyed'*. For some people, particularly in more remote locations higher up in the hills, this meant that their homes had collapsed immediately following the first quake. In upper Gorkha people referred to the village as *'flat land,'* as *'everything just collapsed.'* People told us that old houses, made of mud and stone and particularly those with balconies, were especially likely to have collapsed, often collapsing in on and destroying their grain stores. In another Gorkha location, only two houses were left standing out of approximately 100.

In other locations, particularly at lower elevations, most buildings were still standing. In fact, research teams in these areas initially found it difficult to identify a location where people had been affected by the earthquake. However, on closer inspection, many of these structures were significantly damaged although they were still standing. Some houses had significant deep cracks running through walls, and others had a wall that had collapsed or were leaning at an angle.

People in a number of locations told us they were very confused why some houses had collapsed and others had not. For example, in lower Gorkha we were told, *'most houses were on the same terrain, but some were totally destroyed and some less so.'* All houses, they said, were made from the same stone and mud



**Wall that collapsed in an aftershock in Central Gorkha**



**A damaged house in Kathmandu Valley**





**High school building in lower Gorkha inaugurated 1 year before the earthquake**

combination with plaster on the outside. People's inability to explain why houses collapsed fuelled their concern for the future, as they do not know what else could happen.

In addition to houses, public buildings also collapsed or suffered significant damage. In all locations, the primary schools were significantly damaged; those in mountain locations collapsed entirely. People in these locations were shocked and disturbed by the scale of the damage. One member of a ward citizen's forum in Lower Gorkha summed up this shock, saying *'when a school made by foreigners has collapsed, how will our houses made of stone and mud stand a chance?'*

### Electricity disruption

My 'father' in Upper Gorkha had sold his livestock just before the earthquake and with a further loan from the co-operative had purchased a plant to extract oil from seeds for more than NPR 4 lakhs. The earthquake destroyed the electricity supply and he cannot use the machine. He now has a debts of more than NPR 4 lakh with interest repayments of between 16-18%. *'I have no assets to make any money to repay this now.'*



**Now dysfunctional oil mill**

People in the two most remote locations (upper Gorkha and upper Dhading) said that the government had declared their villages a *'no habitation zone.'* The roads leading to both locations had been seriously damaged, eliminating many of the most direct routes people usually took to access them. Landslides in both locations had damaged farmland and in many cases wiped it out entirely. These villages relied on helicopter drops for relief materials. Electricity supplies were disrupted. For example, in Upper Gorkha the micro-hydro power installation was destroyed during the first shock. This installation kept the village from suffering from electricity shortages or load shedding like many villages nearby. However since the earthquake they have not had any electricity.

In central Gorkha, although electricity lines to houses were broken and meters destroyed the villagers managed to bridge the lines to the temporary shelters either directly or through undamaged meters.

# On livestock and land

*'(The earthquake) made the rich and poor equal. Now we are all starting from the same place.'*

April is a key farming season and usually so intensive that migrant workers in India often return to help their families. During this time, people often harvest winter crops (wheat and barley) plough and preparing the ground for planting summer crops (maize and rice). All host households explained that they were also busy with these activities in the days leading up to the first earthquake.

As a result of the first shock, families living in upper Gorkha and upper Dhading suffered huge losses to their productive assets, with many losing 80-90% of their livestock ( see Box no.). In the months following the second major shock, people in the Kathmandu Valley, told us buffalo milk production had declined since the earthquake, which they attributed to the buffalo being scared and being housed in temporary shelters rather than the secure ground floor of the stone houses.

People in other locations primarily depended on agricultural farming for their livelihood, and had few productive assets associated with this to lose. One man summed this up, saying *'[the earthquake] made the rich and poor equal,'* as everyone was now starting over from the same place. But crops could still be harvested so people said *'we didn't need food grains as we grow these.'*

## **'Loss of livestock was the worst thing'**

Even before the landslides, the study location in Upper Gorkha would have been a day's trek on steep roads which only mules can pass. With the extremely damaged roads it takes a day and half. It was a tourist trekking area and there is active reconstruction in process. Apart from tourism, which has largely stopped since the earthquakes, the main livelihood was livestock rearing; mules (for transportation of goods and trekking) cows, goats, pigs and sheep. Unlike other areas, these animals are not kept in the home but are moved around to graze.

The landslides triggered by the earthquakes killed large numbers of livestock. One of our study families lost 64 of their 80 goats in the earthquake and a further ten died from injuries later. Each was worth about NPR 8,000-10,000 (a loss of around NPR 660,000). Another study family lost 7 of their 9 goats and nine of their ten oxen. A third study family also had only one ox left from a total of ten and had lost twenty out of 24 goats. Families were upset that there had been no compensation for these losses given that these were their main source of income.

# Immediate Reactions

04

*'People were frightened, they just wanted to stay with their families.'*

- Father, Central Gorkha

People relied on their community and neighbours in the immediate hours and days following the first earthquake before outside help arrived. Though in most study locations few or no people died, some people were trapped in collapsed houses and had to be pulled out or crawl free.

People across locations told us that their first concern was to establish the whereabouts of their family members. The lack of phone network coverage, which was disrupted in the hours after the quake, caused great distress. The next key concern was shelter. In all rural locations, people told us that they decided to stay outside of their homes, often in animal sheds or other lightweight structures that were still standing. Their biggest fear with the many aftershocks was to be trapped or crushed by houses that were already weakened by the initial earthquake. Most people stayed in these structures for a few days (central Dhading, Kathmandu Valley) to a few weeks (lower Gorkha) in family groups, often staying together with people from their ethnic/caste groups. For example, in Kathmandu Valley, people in the dalit community said that 20-30 of them stayed together in a chicken shed; in lower Gorkha, nine Newar families stayed close together. *'People were frightened,'* one father explained, *'they just wanted to stay with their families.'*

In upper Gorkha, people told us that most of the village moved to *'flatter ground'* in an open field some hours trek away from the village where they felt safer two days after the earthquake. i They ended up staying there in temporary shelters for a month, but suffered *'serious diarrhoea'* because of the poor water supply.

After managing the first few nights in this way, people across all locations explained that they gradually (over a period of a few days to two weeks) worked together to build temporary shelters in order to leave the animal sheds. As external assistance did not arrive in many places for a few weeks, people assembled these shelters from what they had available (wood, hay and the plastic poly tunnels used for growing vegetables) that could be salvaged from their homes and nearby. In some cases, people waited until they received tarpaulins from the VDC before they did this.

People living in upper Dhading made the biggest shift in the days following the earthquake. They said that the Government had deemed their home village to be unsafe, and they were told about land in lower Dhading that was available for them. People explained that older people were transported down on a Government helicopter, while other people made the multiple day journey on foot. Within a month of the first earthquake, people said that over 200 families had re-settled in lower Dhading, and built temporary shelters in two 'clusters' on previously unused land.

At the time of this study (nine months after the first earthquake), 10 of our 17 study households were still living in temporary shelters. All families in upper Gorkha and upper Dhading had lost their houses and were living in temporary shelters, apart from one family in upper Gorkha which had already managed to rebuild theirs. In central Dhading, our families' houses had been damaged but not destroyed. After some repairs, all were able to live in these structures. Additionally,



**Goat shed that housed 20 people in central Gorkha**



**Temporary shelter constructed 3 days after the first earthquake in central Dhading**

three families, two in the Kathmandu valley and one in Lower Dhading, did not have any visible damage to their homes and continued to live in them as before. Table 56 below illustrates the structures researchers found their HHH living in at the time of this study.

**TABLE 5: STRUCTURES HHH WERE LIVING IN AT TIME OF STUDY**

Central Dhading	Central Gorkha	Upper Gorkha	Peri-Urban Kathmandu	Lower Dhading
Repaired	Destroyed	Destroyed	Destroyed	*Destroyed
Repaired	Destroyed	Destroyed	Destroyed	*Destroyed
Repaired	Destroyed	Reconstructed	Destroyed	*Destroyed
			No damage	No damage

## Rescue

*‘After an hour we had thirty police officers and we tried to rescue people. The first was a five year old girl. We managed to rescue four. Most of the others were already dead. We did this over three hours without any equipment. Finally in the middle of the afternoon we were sent shovels from headquarters.’*

- Police, Kathmandu

In most cases, people in the rural and peri-urban locations said that the police did not visit them soon enough following the first earthquake. The exception was urban Kathmandu, where police came to the site of many collapsed buildings within an hour. However, there people still heavily criticised the police for their inaction when it came to rescuing people from the rubble on the afternoon of the first earthquake.

In central Dhading, people said that the police *‘only came to distribute aid at the VDC later on.’* People in lower Dhading similarly said that the police only came *‘very late after the rescue period had finished’.* A number of people in lower Gorkha said that they never saw the police, while one family told us that they came nearly two months after the first earthquake, when all the clean-up efforts had been completed.

While many people accepted or were resigned to the lack of police help in rescue, in upper Gorkha people were very critical. Echoing others, one man shared *‘many people died because there was no rescue as people were stuck between landslides.’* He added, *‘Earthquake preparedness is focused on buildings but no one here died in a building - we needed rescue.’*

Police stationed in a village downhill from upper Gorkha explained that they also struggled in the immediate aftermath. *‘We couldn’t see anything for days. There was so much dust in the air. Stones kept rolling down the hills during the aftershocks.’* Though no police had been killed, their building had collapsed with their communication equipment, including satellite phones and handsets, inside. In addition the cell phone towers were down. One officer shared, *‘When I don’t know if people are alive or dead, how can I rescue anyone.’* They remained without communications for two months. *‘Our district headquarters didn’t know if we were alive or dead, our families had been told that we had died. We had to finally write a letter and send it with someone able to travel to the district centre to let them know that we were still alive.’*

The police in the Kathmandu bus park area explained to us that they tried their best to initiate a rescue operation but did not get back-up for at least three hours and felt unable to order subordinates into crumbling buildings without equipment. Dons in the area complained that the police looked on while local people tried to do what they could. Frustrations about their inaction led to scuffles with the police and tempers raised. The overall feeling shared with us was that the police were ineffective. Within two days, teams from Norway, Israel and China had joined the efforts with specialist equipment and people remarked, *'only then did our police take part in the rescue... it would have looked bad in front of the international team if they had not helped'*. Others shared how impressed they were with the international rescue efforts and equipment as *'our police had nothing'*.

No one in any location mentioned seeing any army presence at all, with the exception of upper Gorkha, where the army was brought in to 'maintain security' during aid distribution much later on.

#### RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS – 'WE ARE QUICK TO BLAME THE POLICE'

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*'Many in the village complained that the police did not do much. And I also wondered why they had been less conspicuous in rescue efforts. We spoke with the local police and what they said really struck me. First of all there are only eight policemen for four VDCs, which are high in the mountains and far part. One policeman told me, 'When the earth shook, it went dark for two minutes as all the hills around us started crumbling down (landslides). We were shocked for a while. When I myself don't know what has happened to my own house, whether my family is alive or not, how can I go and work? I was not in the mental state to work..... They taught us many things during training, but when whatever little equipment we had was buried under the rubble, we had no communication set, how can we do anything?' In the end I wondered too what else they could do with one shovel and one axe.'*

**Field Notes, Upper Gorkha**

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## Medical support

*'We did everything, there were so many injuries. It was chaotic as people just came and took medicines with them.'*

– Hospital Chair Person, Urban Kathmandu

People told us that immediately following the earthquake, medical help in the rural areas was largely absent. Perhaps surprisingly, people in upper Gorkha were the first to receive medical aid where a makeshift health centre was set up by local health workers, using equipment air-dropped, people believe by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). A Red Cross helicopter was finally able to land ten days later to tend to injured people and move some people to flatter ground. The focus on people with minor injuries was explained to us because more serious injuries had already proved fatal. In other locations, people said that they either did not receive any medical support, or that it arrived a few weeks or months after the earthquake.

In Kathmandu bus park area, medical support was mobilised much sooner, although medical staff shared that they were concerned with their own families and own crises initially. They and patients were very concerned about going inside the hospital building during aftershocks, so a tent was erected outside. It rained the night of the earthquake and the flimsy tent blew off, so some of the injured left. People's unwillingness to enter the hospital building also meant that major surgery was not possible and referrals were made to the teaching hospital. Because of this, hospital staff lamented that *'it was not possible to track people'*. Some people criticised the small local hospitals for not doing enough although some of the critics also wondered what they could have done differently without supplies and ambulances. Police told us that

private van owners exploited the situation and charged large sums to transport injured people so some police tried to manage this instead.

## Dealing with the bodies

Both villagers and police in upper Gorkha said that they would continue to find bodies of both people and animals on trails and in fields in the weeks and months after the shocks. People in the village had also seen this. Police said there was no way to dispose of these bodies properly or identify the people, so in some cases they would bury them where they were, cover them with stones, and in other cases would push them into the river. Health workers explained that it was impossible to identify or remove the bodies and there was *'no way to extract the bodies from the rocks, you could just bury them.'*

In urban Kathmandu, more bodies and injuries were brought to the hospital than hospital staff could handle. Staff sent the seriously injured who may be able to be saved to the teaching hospital, and kept bodies of the dead outside in an area guarded by the police as there was no other place where they could be stored, though no identification was done at that point.

The police and neighbours removed bodies from many buildings that collapsed, though were limited by the fact that they only had shovels. Police said they removed 114 bodies and rescued 4 people from one building, though they continued to remove bodies from this site for another three months. Police sprayed the rubble from this and other buildings with disinfectant as they knew more bodies were still trapped inside. The community police said they had closed stores selling meat immediately following the first quake as they were concerned that so many dead bodies would contaminate the supplies.

## Food Assistance



**Grain stores rescued from a collapsed house in central Dhading**

Food was not the issue for most people in the immediate aftermath of the quakes as one man in Kathmandu Valley summed up what others across other locations felt *'you can always get food,'* and others said *'you don't have to worry about food'*. People explained that food could be bought locally and they had cash to do this. Many farmers were continuing to plant and harvest (winter crops and winter vegetables) in April/May. Furthermore, about half our HHH were able to retrieve their grain stores from their homes and although half way through the storage season for rice and maize still had significant stocks.

In most locations, people said that they received very little aid materials between the first and second earthquakes. In less remote places like Kathmandu Valley and central Dhading, people said that they only received tarpaulins (one per family), or plastic sheets. However, in more remote areas like upper Gorkha and Dhading, people told us that they did receive some food aid via helicopter. People in both locations told us that this process was chaotic and haphazard. People from upper Dhading told us that the helicopter drops began even on the afternoon of the first earthquake with food items like biscuits and instant noodles. People said that when dropped, these items *'often split,' 'landed on stones,'* or got lost so they were unusable. A few days later once they were able to drop things more effectively, a number of people told us that the police came to oversee the aid distribution process, along with the Army in one instance. People in Upper Gorkha recounted a similar experience with aid provided by an Indian helicopter two days after the quake, saying, *'they dropped rice but when it landed the bag exploded and no one could eat it.'* The personnel from the Red Cross helicopter which landed ten days later said that they *'would be back with more relief'* but never returned.

### Cash was not scarce

Most people in the central Gorkha area were in their fields when the first earthquake hit. While this was appreciated by people because few had suffered serious injury from collapsing buildings, they told us they did not have their cash on them. One daughter in law in a study family said *'I only had NPR 50 on me at the time'*. She, like others, was afraid to go inside her house to get her cash or the grain stored there. She went to buy puffed rice from the local shop. Normally NPR 40 she was charged NPR 50 and so had no more cash. Next day she asked for credit but this was denied. She had no alternative but to enter the house and retrieve her savings even though she was scared.

Field Notes, central Gorkha

## Food Prices

In Kathmandu, people told us that prices of food jumped on the first day of the earthquake, with noodles, for example, selling for four times the usual price and bottled water as much as ten times the usual price. A teashop owner shared that while she normally makes about NPR15 lakh per day, on the day of the earthquake she made NPR90 lakh. The shortage of rooms to rent put rents up overnight. For example, one person shared that he rented a place for NPR 3000 but that someone else had offered the landlord NR 5000. People indicated that many tenants were being evicted so that landlords could inflate rents.

In the Kathmandu peri-urban area, people said food prices increased immediately but that it was only a problem for things they were not able to provide for themselves. Most families said they have some small farmland for their own consumption and vegetables are grown and sold locally. But cooking oil doubled in price.

Outside of Kathmandu, people mostly did not experience such dramatic food price hikes but merely grumbled about the usual mark-up on goods brought in from the town to sell in small local kiosks. In Upper Gorkha the mule transportation costs rose by 2-300% depending if the hirer was local or not. The increase was explained because the paths were actually harder to navigate and 'riskier' after the many landslides and the increase was declared by the powerful mule owners committee.

## Transport and communications

*'How can we ask for money at such a time?'*

– Bus Owners, Urban Kathmandu

For three days after the first earthquake, nothing happened at the Kathmandu bus park as drivers were unsure wait for police reports to confirm the safety of particular routes. Large crowds of people were



stranded in the bus park and did not disperse for the first few days. Here, we were told that in the early days buses arrived with fruit, biscuits and water to be distributed. Some bus owners offered their vehicles for use by district relief committees, while others exploited the transit shortage and charged high prices. Many people living nearby the bus park told us that they left the area as soon as they could, often returning to their home villages, as doing so *'was safer'*.

People in remote locations were very upset that the cell phone services were disrupted in the hours following the earthquake. One mother in Dhading explained, *'these hours were the most terrible... my four children were all in different places and I could not get any news.'* In most locations, people said that the disruption to cell phone signals caused additional panic, as they had no way to contact their families. These services were restored the same day as the first quake, with the exception of in upper Gorkha. There, one man shared that he had not been able to contact his wife and daughter for 4 days, as they were travelling from another village and could not return home.

Once mobile service was restored, people with family members abroad said they were in regular contact with them via mobile. In some cases, individuals working abroad sent extra money to help with reconstruction. Though one HHH in central Gorkha was not expecting any extra funds to come from their relatives working in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the NPR 1.8 lakh they sent every three months allowed them to clear the rubble of their home and prepare for reconstruction. This money is generally transferred through services such as IME and Moneygram, which were still functioning during this period.

## Fears



**Trail in upper Gorkha damaged from landslides**

As explained above, people were particularly fearful that their damaged houses would collapse and opted to sleep outside. In urban Kathmandu, people claimed that houses had been constructed in contravention of building regulations by *'greedy landlords'* who used sub-standard materials and hasty construction methods. Many people pointed out collapsed buildings with underground water tanks or extra levels, which they explained had affected their stability. People blamed the Government for poor monitoring and for accepting taxes on buildings which were actually illegal. Hotel and shop owners said that fewer people come to this area as compared to the period before the earthquake because the narrow alleys and buildings are still in a precarious state.

Some people were clearly traumatised in the early aftermath of the earthquake. For example, a shopkeeper at the Kathmandu bus stand told of a girl who was so shocked she could not eat, drink or sleep and nobody was sure what to do as she had no injuries but was in need of some medical help. A young boy in the family in remote Gorkha said he did not speak for five days and kept searching for someone to hug. He explained, *'the only thing in my head was that I was going to die and I wanted to die with someone I know'*

In Kathmandu, people shared one of their greatest fears was the outbreak of disease. Water shortages led to very poor sanitation, especially in the bus park area. People told us no water came for five days. Police closed down meat shops because of fears of contamination.

Rumours spread about ghosts in some of the devastated areas. People said you could hear them, but others said that thieves making noises to scare people away from their homes so they could steal the valuables left inside. Police were aware of this and stepped up patrols, though said that this was an on-going problem.

Relief

05

*'People come to donate things for self-satisfaction but that's not actually useful.'*

People told us that the first quake was the most traumatic, and the period immediately after the most stressful. This contrasted with their views on the second earthquake, which people described as much less traumatic, despite being a tremor of significant magnitude. It was after this that people started to receive more significant aid.

## Sources of help

### The Government

Overall, people said that the most impactful relief came in the form of cash given by the Government. In all locations except Upper Gorkha, people had already received these cash transfers at the time of our visit.

In order to receive this benefit, people told us that the level of damage sustained by their family and property needed to be assessed and documented on an official Earthquake Victim Identification card, which provided an NPR15k cash benefit. Though people often struggled to remember exactly when they received this transfer, people in central Dhading families received their cards two months following the first earthquake, around June 2015. This was around a month sooner than people in other locations said they received their transfers.

While people often seemed unclear on the rules and procedures for accessing this benefit, most people recognised that, *'if you need aid from the Government, you need a card.'* Recipients of the cash transfers told us that they used it to buy materials to build temporary shelters with, as well as to cover food and other needs. In many cases people said this process supported by the ward level forum or relief committee.

Across all locations, nearly all houses had been officially declared 'completely destroyed.' People described this structural assessment process differently in different locations, Given that this process was intended to identify those eligible for significant government benefits, people across locations mentioned that both individuals and political leaders had a vested interest in the outcome of the assessment. In central Gorkha, we were told that a few people came to the community and noted down everyone's name who had a house, but did not require any identification documents or proof that the family owned the land or structure. There, all stone and mud structures were automatically categorised as 'fully damaged', without any physical assessment of the level of damage. This process was similar in central Dhading, where many people said that the inspection teams were scared to go inside the houses, so they declared all 'fully damaged' without examination. This assessment process was the source of tension in some locations, as many people complained that *'not all houses were actually completely destroyed,'* despite being listed by the technical teams as such. In upper Gorkha, we were told that *'someone from the*

#### Diary of help provided

*'On April 25th we lived in a bamboo shelter near the school. On the 27th we moved to flat land for a few days. A helicopter hovered overhead and people shouted down 'does anyone here need to be rescued?' We moved again to stay in an open field as we felt safer. Indian helicopters came and dropped rice but the bags burst on impact so nobody could eat it. On May 5<sup>th</sup> a Red Cross helicopter was the first to actually land. They took care of some injured people. They said they would be back but they did not come back. A local leader went to fetch things himself but was told at the district office that helicopters would come with relief materials. They didn't.'*

#### Host household father, Upper Gorkha

*"My' mother said that neighbours came to her house and told her she would need a red card to get aid from the Government. She told her sons and they got it for her and told her to keep it on her at all times. "Don't leave it in the house in case the house collapses". The first aid came through the VDC after all the names were collected.*

#### Field Notes, Central Dhading

VDC' and the police collected data on deaths and damage to buildings as the basis of assessment. There, one card was issued per dwelling, and listed in the name of the landowner. In lower Dhading, people said that local teachers were responsible for listing the damaged houses. As one man said *'they [the teachers] were scared that if they didn't list all houses as fully damaged, we would become violent. This is the reason all were listed as fully damaged in this area.'*

Once the assessment process was complete, people were required to collect their cards from the VDC office (central Dhading), or the school (lower Dhading) or at the ward office (lower Gorkha). In some locations people said they needed to show their citizenship documents for this process (central Dhading), while in other places no identification was required.

People explained that these rules were applied to joint families differently across different locations, and were often a significant point of contention. For example, in lower Gorkha joint families were considered to be separate families, even though they shared a house. No documentation was necessary to confirm that the property was officially divided. In fact, many people shared that they pretended to be in separate joint families in order to obtain multiple cards for their families. They would do this by having daughters pose as daughters-in-law and having visiting family members pose as permanent dwellers. Although in central Dhading people said that only one card could be issued per house, one grandfather explained that his grown sons, who were also living with him, managed to get their own cards by telling the assessment team that they had their own houses.

By contrast, people in lower Dhading and Upper Gorkha complained that the cards and the NPR15k benefit was allocated only by house, rather than by family or by the number of people, even for very large households. In these locations, local relief committee members told us that even they were confused about the rules. In upper Gorkha, this created a concern that future aid would only apply to the whole household even though the family *'will inevitably separate'* at some point.



**A red cross put on a house in the Kathmandu Valley by a technical team in to identify it as 'fully damaged'**

### Box: An overview of the Earthquake Cards

Earthquake Victim Identification Cards were distributed to survivors whose houses had been completely destroyed in the earthquake on April 25 and associated aftershocks. These cards were intended to help identify who was eligible for government financial assistance, including the 15,000 NPR intended to be used for immediate relief. Each district's District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) was responsible for printing the ID cards, leading them to be produced in a variety of colours and formats, depending in the district.



**An earthquake card issued to one HHH in central Gorkha**

*'This is why there are more cards being issued than actual houses.'*

**Grandfather, Central Dhading**



**Ritual conducted by a lama in Upper Gorkha following the death ritual. It is said that this is not completed, the soul will never be free.**

*'We were called to the ward office sometime later and received the card and collected the NPR 15,000 in cash at the same time.'*

**Woman, Lower Gorkha**

### Example of the relief card distribution

People told us that two people came to the village (but they were not sure who they were). They called meetings in all the neighbourhoods and listed all the households, but also made a point of listing separate families in these households. So, for example in one of our study households three families were listed (mother and two daughters in law) and were entitled to three cards. Many people in this area have property here but don't actually live here permanently (some had moved to Kathmandu) but they also got the relief cards. The officials 'glanced' at the houses, did not check any ownership documents and declared the houses 'completely destroyed'. Some said that even just having an outside shed which had collapsed still entitled one to a 'red card'

**Field Notes, Central Gorkha**

In a number of locations, many people had not been issued cards at all. For example, a host-grandmother in central Gorkha explained that *'our family was supposed to get three cards but we missed one because one of my daughters -in-law was in Pokhara. Since then, she went to a nearby VDC and Gorkha to reapply for the card, but is still waiting'*. Twenty one of the displaced families living in lower Dhading had been outside the village on the day the assessment was conducted and also missed out on cards.

People across locations also mentioned suspecting 'irregularities' with respect to the card distribution process. In lower Dhading, many people knew families who had received a 'completely destroyed' status even though their homes had been minimally damaged. In central Dhading, people often repeated the rumour that although there were 83,000 households in the area, 86,000 cards had been issued. All people in this location linked this irregularity to the frequent transfer of Chief District Officers (CDOs), implying corruption. As of December 2015, people in Upper Gorkha had still not received their NPR 15k benefit from the Government and many believed the VDC secretary had *'embezzled the money'* together with an international NGO. They said that because of this, they believe that the VDC secretary is now scared to come to the village, as people are so angry that they *'have plans to kill him if he does come'*.

People also shared more mundane concerns about the cards, including that many names were misspelled or identification numbers were written incorrectly. A few people in lower Dhading said they had visited the municipality office to try to have this corrected as it *'could cause problems in the future'* when accessing further aid. However, they had given up on this as the *'secretary is often not there.'*

In urban Kathmandu, only the house owners received any support, leaving those renting properties (even those with long term leases) without any benefits. Tenants who had *'lost everything'* explained that they received no compensation *'as it all goes to the owner'* and were not entitled to other re-construction loans.

A few people we encountered had also received additional cash transfers from the government. By law, additional government benefits were available to families who had lost loved ones, including a NPR 100,000 compensation and a further NPR 40,000 for the funeral. However, some Tamang families living in lower Dhading explained that they had to do *'many rituals after people die'* and that the compensation was *'not even enough to cover this.'*

In addition, many older people in upper and Central Gorkha had received the allowance of NPR 7,500 made available to elderly

people. In Upper Gorkha, people explained that only elderly people who were already getting social security benefits received this cash transfer. These benefits largely covered daily household expenses and food, although most elderly people we met did not know how this money had been distributed, as the process was often managed by younger members of their family.

## Other support

Beyond transfers from the government, people commonly did not know who provided the aid they received usually simply referring to them as ‘organisations,’ and often could not remember when it arrived. People often did not know who provided relief items, even when they displayed logos and other supplier information.

Those who could remember in upper Gorkha and upper Dhading most commonly cited Care Nepal as the source of most relief material in their communities. In lower regions of these districts (central Dhading, lower Gorkha) Church and Christian groups provided the majority of aid, as compared with the Kathmandu Valley where people said that the Red Cross was the main provider of aid. In upper Dhading, people said that the Chinese were the first people to provide relief as their VDC bordered China.

Christian schools provided a significant amount of relief in a number of locations, though people said they tended to prioritise Christian communities. This was the case in lower Dhading, where non-Christians complained that the school only gave corrugated sheets and food to Christians, though the coordinator insisted that these relief materials were given to everyone. In the Kathmandu Valley, a school distributed significant relief materials, though only to families of children attending the school. People there raised similar complaints as in lower Dhading, criticising the school for ‘*using religious motives to win people over.*’

People shared the importance of capitalising on personal connections and networks outside the village when trying to secure relief materials, including those provided by the Government. For example, some villages used their connection to a Constituent Assembly member to have tarpaulins delivered to their village from the Government. People in other locations also called on friends and community members living in Kathmandu to organise relief materials. People in upper Gorkha who felt that their village received less aid than other villages explained ‘*we get less than other VDCs because we don’t have these connections.*’

Political parties were not especially prominent in the relief effort, though there was more evidence from across locations of all-Party cooperation through relief committees than partisan distribution of aid. For example, in the Kathmandu Valley, these committee members also accompanied engineers to assess damage levels for houses in the community.

However, some communities and individuals were disappointed that their Party affiliations had not resulted in more relief, both from the Party and specific local politicians. In a number of cases, politician’s preference to

### Unmet promises

People in the Kathmandu Valley shared how upset they were with the many, many people who came to interview them after the earthquake and did nothing. They implored us not ‘*to scratch these wounds*’. They felt people had used photographs for their own personal benefit. For example, a Japanese woman took photos of a young girl whose father had died and promised to come back with aid but never did. A German team also came and asked a lot of questions but never came back.

### Field Notes, the Kathmandu Valley

#### Balancing political parties

‘The eldest son in ‘my’ family used his connections to bring eight tarpaulins to the village. He went to the chief of the relief committee and asked how to distribute these to the rest of the community. The man wouldn’t take the relief, saying that the government had a new mechanism to distribute this (the committees). However, the son suspected that the man had rejected the items because he was a Maoist and ‘our’ family are CPN-UML members, and accepting that CPN-UML had contributed to the relief efforts would benefit our party, which is something bad for the Maoists.

### Field Notes, Kathmandu Valley

## Youth groups

In the Kathmandu Valley, people shared that youth wings of political parties came to clear debris. My family explained that the CPN-UML youth wing came first to start clearing, and then other youth wings also started doing this. 'My' father complained that when people are helping others for free, even youth, they should receive some food from the family. But he said people *'are so greedy that they don't even give food to the people who came to clean up their houses.'* As he was the contact person for the CPN-UMK, he told the volunteers not to help people, since they are so greedy. Other people in the village said that they were also annoyed that the youth cadres would steal fruit from the trees.

## Field notes, the Kathmandu Valley

distribute aid through this committee rather than on an individual basis aroused both frustration and suspicion among community members that their refusal to do so was still for some political gain. Although parties cooperated through these ward committees, people also commonly shared that politicians would use their connections to access additional resources for themselves.

A number of locations, youth clubs were often active in the relief efforts. In some cases this focused more on distributing aid, while in others these groups' organised funerals and other rituals to honour the dead. Some of this was by youth wings of political parties and the help was sometimes met with mixed reactions (see Box). In other cases, youth volunteers were active in relief distribution, but not as part of an organised group.

There was mention of individual donors across locations. Often these were from overseas with some connection to the village, who also contributed items to the relief effort. Distribution of these items was largely *ad hoc*, with some being channelled through the relief committees, and others given to people directly or collected by whoever was around the distribution area when it arrived. Though in all locations people mentioned these *ad hoc* forms of relief, this was most common in upper Gorkha, where people shared that someone from the village was married to a French woman, who, along with friends, had brought basic food items, lamps, stoves and CGI sheets to the village about 2.5 months following the first earthquake.



Recovery

06

*'We don't need food or grains, we grow these here. We need help rebuilding houses.'*

- Upper Gorkha

## What relief was provided?

People across all locations told us that relief materials only began to come to their communities in substantial quantities after the second quake, approximately three weeks following the first one. These materials generally included a combination of food items, mattresses, blankets, cooking utensils, tarpaulins and CGI sheets, intended to construct temporary shelters. Across all locations, people told us that shelter was the most important form of aid they could receive.



**The shelter materials were not used because they arrived too late'**

Most people built their shelters within a few days or weeks after the first earthquake; for most people, CGI sheets arrived between 1 and 5 months later. Though some people incorporated these items into their shelters, others did not 'because they arrived too late,' though lamented that 'we would have been able to make our house with the CGI if it came right away.' The late arrival of the CGI sheets meant that people had to cover the costs of building their temporary shelters themselves, including dedicating a substantial portion of their NPR 15k benefit to cover these costs.

### **Shelter was most important**

*'My' family built a temporary shelter three days after the earthquake. They used whatever they could salvage from their old house including wood and hay. They lived here for nearly four months and then added the tarpaulins when this aid eventually came. When the CGI sheets came (much later) they used these to cover the first floor of their old house. They only received four so had to buy a further four.*

### **Field Notes, Central Dhading**

### **Playing off residence to get additional relief**

One of the study families in the relief camp explained how he had returned to his old village and built a temporary shelter there even though he has no intention to live there again in the foreseeable future. He did this to get the relief there and the shelter remains empty. Others shared that they frequently revisit the old village to 'get as much aid as possible' and leave their children in the camp so they don't miss out on hand-outs here. I met other road workers who were getting relief in their own village and where they were currently residing. They had got 50g of rice and 10kg of lentils as a result.

### **Field Notes, Dhading**

In addition to construction materials, relief also came in the form of food. This included rice (between 10 and 25 kg), though people often complained that it was distributed in an ad hoc manner. People in lower Dhading received 6kg of rice from the municipality but complained that it was such poor quality that they threw it away.

People explained that this food supplemented people's own food stores but did not significantly change their situation. In a number of cases, people declined relief materials, saying 'we have enough food to eat so we didn't take the relief.' (Kathmandu Valley) The exception to this were people living in the temporary settlement in lower Dhading, many of whom said that that they depended entirely on this aid. They explained that this relief was a significant motivation for not returning to their home village. Over time, these families have started sending some people back to the village to tend to livestock, leaving others remain in the camp to continue to collect the food aid. One man spoke for others, saying 'our people don't want to go [back to our village] because we want aid, the rice is good quality.' We observed that rice was so plentiful in this settlement that people would often discard recently cooked but uneaten rice rather than saving it for later meals as is the custom.



Temporary shelters constructed in central Dhading using tarpaulin given out in the weeks after the first earthquake, before the CGI sheets arrived

### Air Dropped Aid

The families said they were never sure what aid they might get and when it might arrive. Six bundles of tarpaulins were dropped by 'UK Aid', some said, but most thought it was actually from an ex British Gorkha who now lives in Britain as the names of the would-be recipients were written on them. Canned fish was also dropped which people said 'was disgusting'.

### Field Notes Central Gorkha

Similarly, women were often confused by the 'dignity kits,' as they do not typically use maxi pads and products included in them. One man in the Kathmandu Valley summed up other people's frustrations about inappropriate relief, saying *'people come here to donate things for self-satisfaction, but it's not actually that useful.'*

## How was relief provided?

*'The more people who write their names, the more aid will be available.'*

- Advice from a Pastor

People described the aid distribution process as haphazard and chaotic. In a number of locations, people told us that their wards or VDCs had established a 'relief committee' to administer these supplies, composed generally of local politicians representing each of the major political parties. However, many ordinary people had never heard of these committees or, if they had heard, did not know their purpose or how they functioned. In most locations, relief committee members told us that their role was to coordinate aid

In addition, most people in upper Gorkha had stopped working in their fields and also depended significantly on aid as to supplement their stores of food. In most cases we observed that families there had significant stocks of food and relief materials, often sufficient to last for multiple months. We observed families in upper Gorkha drinking coffee and soda and eating large meals, further suggesting that people there were not struggling to get enough to eat.

In a number of locations, people often raised concerns that NGOs and organisations had promised to bring relief to the community but never returned. For example, in Dhading people complained that visitors only came to do 'research' but did not do anything to help. One man mentioned that an organisation had come to assess the community's needs, but 'never brought what was necessary.' He added that, 'all Nepal knows is how to do research, but not how to do anything fruitful.'

Though overall people said they were mostly satisfied with relief materials, a few around significant criticism. People thought that the canned sardines sent from UK aid and the Pyush water purifying drops tasted bad and threw out both. This could be related to the fact that in many places people did not have problems with their water, nor did they receive instructions on how to use the Pyush. People also thought the UK Aid water filters were too difficult to use. In lower Dhading, people complained about the thin cooking pans from the Red Cross that were not designed to be put directly into the fire, as is typical of cooking in rural Nepal. These soon burned through and were useless. This was also the case for steel utensils provided in upper Gorkha. Many people were confused after receiving butter knives, spoons and toothbrushes, none of which they had ever seen.

distribution within their community based on those in the most need, though these determinations were largely made ‘informally.’

Despite the existence of these committees, many people commented that they were not always the conduit for relief. In many locations, people said that many organisations (Christian organisations, schools, youth clubs) did not provide relief through the committees and targeted this distribution in what they described as a ‘subjective’ way’. In the Kathmandu Valley, a teacher at a Christian school explained their process, ‘we formed a group of students and went to villages to survey people’s needs. This was based on the judgement of the students and not official criteria. Then we distributed the aid based on this need.’ This school distributed NPR 2lakhs worth of relief materials donated by the school and both local and international private donors. In lower Gorkha, the Vice Chairman of the Ward Committee said that relief material was not often channelled through his committee and noted that ‘if there was an elected body here [in the VDC] this process would have been easier.’

‘We met a French guy on the road coming down from the village walking with a porter. He said that they had already been helping with a school nearby, but were coming up to see what else could be done. However, he said that the coordination of the relief distribution is ‘poor’.

Field Notes, Upper Gorkha

*‘A few received a large amount (of relief) and others got nothing.’ Kathmandu Valley*



People in upper Gorkha returning from collecting relief materials, including mattresses and mats

*‘We did not go and ask for a card because we were not badly affected. But there were others like us who did get cards even though they also were not really affected.’*

Host Household Mother, Kathmandu Valley



The VDC office in upper Gorkha was locked as the VDC secretary generally is not present.

People in a number of locations mentioned that this informal targeting and distribution process made opened the aid distribution process up to exploitation. For example, in the Kathmandu Valley, a man told us what many others had also explained, ‘it was the clever people who got involved in the distribution process. Those are the rich people who made sure that their families received aid.’ In central and lower Dhading, communities felt that some Christian groups had exploited this process. For example, in lower Dhading, the local pastor encouraged everyone to list their names as having damaged homes, saying ‘the more people who write their names, the more aid will be available.’ As no non-Christians received aid from the church, they assumed that the pastor took the aid ‘earmarked for them’. People in central Dhading who received CGI sheets from the local Church were required to pay NPR 1000 per sheet for ‘transport.’ Although they paid this as they needed the sheets, they were suspicious that this cost was high and not charged by any other organisation distributing aid.

For many people, radio was also a source of general information, as well as anxiety about relief distribution. After the first earthquake, people heard radio reports about high casualties in Kathmandu and in remote areas, creating concern for family members living in these places. As time progressed, the radio stations covered the aid distribution process, particularly large quantities of aid that were sent to areas close to the epicentre. In Central Dhading, people said that these broadcasts made them feel that they had received less relief than other villages. People in upper Gorkha drew similar conclusions and believed that their

village *'got less than other VDCs because we don't have these connections.'*

In addition to relief materials that were specifically targeted, there were periodic deliveries of relief materials in some locations which were theoretically available to anyone. However, in practice, some people explained that you also needed connections within the community in order to know when aid was being distributed. For example, in lower Dhading, one man who was *'close with the authorities of the school'* managed to get twice the amount of rice and CGI sheets that most people received (22kg rice and sixteen CGI sheets). In the Kathmandu Valley, people reflected that the importance of connections to people distributing aid meant that people who were not originally from the area often found it harder to access relief. A number of families explained that *'aid would come in during the night'*, and be distributed to *'specific people'* so that *'a few received a large amount, and others got nothing.'*

For those who did receive relief materials, it was necessary to physically collect them from depots, often in other wards or even further away (in upper Gorkha, a 1 ½ hour walk away). This disadvantaged any families without people physically able to carry out this task, and elderly and injured people in particular. Though people in all locations complained about unfairness of the distribution process, aid targeted at certain caste groups was a particular source of tension. For example, Brahmin families in the Kathmandu Valley saw that some organisations helped only Dalit and Tamang families *'because they were minorities'*. One member of a Brahmin host household explained that *'they get all the aid, still they ask for more'*. We were told about arguments between Dalit, Brahmin and Chettri women regarding who had first right to take from the newly arrived CGI sheets. A similar situation occurred in lower Gorkha, where Dalits received 2-3 bundles of eight CGI sheets provided by a *'rich doctor'* while everyone else got 2-3 CGI sheets and people complained saying *'the earthquake didn't happen only to Dalits'*. Another man commented, *'donors only want to help minorities'*.

While in most locations, Dalits did not feel that they had received more relief materials than others in their community. The exception was in lower Gorkha, where Dalits asserted they had received more aid than other groups, but insisted that this was legitimate, saying *'we didn't have to steal it; they just gave it to us'*. Some Dalits there were also upset that they had been singled out for relief and received rice, blankets and CGI sheets, saying *'we [Dalits] got a lot of things but really needy people didn't actually get what they needed'*. But others rationalised this, saying it was because they *'had less land they could produce less than the others. The relief people had figured this out so they gave more to the Dalits'*. However, the socio-economic situation of these Dalit families did not seem to differ greatly from others in the community, as they had more family members working abroad and providing remittances than the Brahmin or Chettri family.

Despite the many objections people had regarding aid distribution, there was rarely a means to complain. People in upper Gorkha felt they had no one they could complain to. They explained that they would normally complain to the VDC secretary, but they suspected he was corrupt so did not want to do this. No one in central Dhading mentioned having complained about the relief efforts, or wanting to complain. In lower Gorkha, one man said that he would like to lodge a complaint about the fact that families with *'completely damaged'* houses received the same benefit as *'partially damaged'* ones. It is not common to lodge a complaint, so he did not know how or where to do this. However, a group of people in the Kathmandu Valley were able to file a similar complaint at the police station, asserting that not all houses were *'completely damaged'* despite being officially assessed as such. At first, those accused of having

### Why did Dalits get more?

Dalit families in Central Gorkha were particularly vocal about the unfairness they felt at receiving relief in preference to others. They said there were many non Dalits who deserved it more than they did. They got rice, lentils, blankets and CGI sheets. They said the outside organisations just made these decisions based on the fact that they were landless. But several pointed out that they had family members working abroad, sometimes several and usually more than other caste groups in the community. They had cash (which researchers observed was conspicuous) and tended to have more assets than others such as TVs and smart phones.

### Field Notes, Central Gorkha

exaggerated their damage were '*blacklisted*' from receiving compensation. This changed after the group visited the VDC and '*pressured the secretary to provide them with compensation,*' an incident which a number of people mentioned '*became violent.*' The situation was resolved when those who had been '*blacklisted*' were given NPR15k.

Coping

07

*'Losing your house is like losing your life savings'*

- Man, Lower Gorkha

## Economic coping

We observed that the earthquake had differing impacts on the economy of each location. At the time of our visit, most families had resumed their livelihood activities, especially farming. However, some older people had decided to abandon their fields as they were afraid that another earthquake may happen in the future, particularly those living in the mountains. People in central Dhading said that they understood that reducing their work meant that they would have smaller harvests. However, they did not expect this to significantly impact their families given the cash benefits they had received from the Government and the future benefits they expected. People told us that livelihood activities in urban Kathmandu recovered quite quickly and people soon resumed income earning activities

The people who suffered the most significant economic impacts from the quakes had lost major productive assets, particularly livestock. This was particularly severe in upper Gorkha, where many people had lost over half their animals. Though they were not expecting any compensation for this, people mentioned that this would have been the most useful form of relief as many people have lost so many animals that need to *'start over again'*.

Those working in construction also said there was less work, mainly because people have not yet begun to rebuild and new construction was on hold. Shopkeepers in this area complained that their trade had diminished significantly since relief materials started coming in and people no longer needed to buy goods.

People living in the settlements in lower Dhading said that they struggled to find work there. Some people had managed to find day labour as porters or other labour opportunities, but payments often were made in kind (vegetables or food) rather than cash. They explained that in this new area, there were also no opportunities for more steady work on other people's land, or to work as tenant farmers. However, we observed that the fact that people living in these settlements received relief materials may have made the matter of finding employment less urgent.

In the Kathmandu valley, many people had depended on work in factories or hotels in the city. While some people had returned to work, the combination of the earthquake damage and the fuel shortage meant that they were still waiting for work to resume. People living in upper Gorkha, who worked as guides, porters and cooks for trekkers prior to the earthquake were also waiting for their work to resume, understanding that fewer trekkers were coming as a result of the earthquake and that many trails had been destroyed in landslides.

Despite these challenges, people in all locations had cash to spend. For the most part, people told us that this came from relatives who were working abroad. In lower Gorkha, people told us that even though they received little food aid, they could still buy food *'as normal'* with what they receive. In lower Dhading, local shop owners said that the people who had migrated in from upper Dhading had plenty of cash to buy from them and they had seen increasing sales. The exception to this were elderly people with no family or people



**One of a number of taps in lower Dhading that dried up after the earthquake**

*'Recovery depends on how scared you are. If you are not scared you can re-start business straight away. You just need money to clear away the rubble that's all. We're not bothered about the physical risks. If you can make money that's what matters.'*

### **Kathmandu trader**

The father in 'my' family had been supporting the family ever since his uncle died. He worked in the casino in the Everest hotel for fifteen years. The hotel was badly damaged in the earthquake and was still closed eight months later. He took a job in a café nearby to earn some money, but was hoping the casino would re-open. The pay was much better.

### **Field notes, Kathmandu Valley**



responsible for caring for injured family members. These people struggled to cover even their basic needs without a job or remittances.

During the time of this study, much of Nepal was significantly affected by high fuel and commodity prices resulting from a blockade of the southern border. While people in most sites were aware of this, the only people who said they paid higher prices for goods as a result of this blockade were those living in the location closest to Kathmandu. However, people in the less remote locations of lower Dhading and Central Gorkha did experience higher prices for commodities and scarcity of both cooking gas and petrol. In some places, people started taking firewood from the community forest for cooking as they could no longer use their gas stoves. Prices for transport for both people and goods were affected as a result of this shortage, going from NPR 3,200 to NPR 4,000 per trip for tractor services in Central Gorkha.

As people told us that their house was their most important asset and investment, damage and collapse of a house had significant economic implications. People commonly shared their concern that rebuilding and reconstruction would be a major burden and leave them in debt. As one man in lower Gorkha described, *'losing your house is like losing your life's savings.'* He said that he had spent NPR9 lakhs two years ago to build his home and the outside walls had completely collapsed in the first earthquake. Many people had lived in their homes for multiple generations and used their savings to improve and expand it to accommodate joint families. He worried about the cost of reconstruction as he had *'no idea how to manage the same amount'* to rebuild the structure. The emotional weight and practical challenges of reconstructing a home meant that few people in any location were in a hurry to reconstruct. Give that, there was little evidence in any location that people had borrowed money from co-operatives, money lenders or relatives for this purpose.

In most locations, people told us that cooperative savings groups were now functioning as they did prior to the earthquakes. The exception to this was in Upper Gorkha, where members of a women's cooperative told us that their members had stopped paying off their loans in the months after the earthquake as they had so many other expenses. They indicated that demand for loans was also lower since the earthquake. In central Gorkha, people were not borrowing from the women's cooperative because they had received their NPR 15k benefit from the government. In all locations, people said they preferred to borrow money from their families as interest rates in these cooperatives were often high, ranging from 12% per year in lower Gorkha to 18% per year in Upper Gorkha. The most common reason for borrowing money following the earthquake was to cover medical treatment for family members. For example, a man in central Dhading told us that he had borrowed NPR 35k from neighbours in order to cover medical treatment for his son who was injured in a building collapse in Kathmandu.

Only a few families we interacted with as part of this study had already reconstructed their houses. In lower Gorkha, a neighbour of one host household had borrowed NPR 70k from a relative (interest free) so that he could begin reconstruction of his house. He said that this relative could afford to lend this money as he had a steady income from three sons working abroad. In central Dhading, another man from a host household said that he had taken a NPR 30k loan from a local lender to renovate his damaged house and had already repaid it using the NPR15k from the government and money sent by family members working abroad. People told us that relatives working abroad, largely in the Gulf, were a significant source of financial support following the earthquake. People often referred to international migration work as a sort of insurance and a guaranteed way to support their families, though this was a *'regular trend'* rather than something that had changed as a result of the quakes.

## Practical coping

While people were generally in no hurry to reconstruct their house, many had repaired their damaged structures as much as they were able. In central Dhading, lower Gorkha and the Kathmandu Valley, people said that they had plastered or painted over cracks in houses that were damaged but still standing, especially in traditional preparation for the Dashain festivities in October when it is customary to repair and restore houses. Improving the aesthetics of homes, people explained, also helped them feel a sense of normalcy, but in some cases it also made it harder to ascertain the level of damage and the risks taken in living there once again.

By the time of our visit in November 2015, the weather had grown so cold that many people whose houses were still standing had decided to move back into these structures rather than sleep in their temporary shelters. Elderly people in lower Gorkha and central Dhading in particular explained that they did this despite the fact that they preferred to sleep in the shelters as they *'could sleep without fear there'*. One woman from rural Dhading summed this up, explaining that, *'we have no option. People are scared about the conditions of the houses but we can run out if we feel motion. We don't lock our doors so we can go out quickly.'*

## Social coping

*'Safety means being with family.'* - Kathmandu Valley

Entire villages had moved from upper Dhading down to new settlements closer to the market after the earthquake. There, people settled in the same community and social groups as they had in their original villages. These familiar groupings, people explained, served as a source of both protection and emotional support, especially as they felt that their host community *'want[ed] to chase us away from this place.'* People from upper Dhading attributed this tension to the fact that they had received significantly more relief than the host community. In fact, many members of this host community recognised that the people from upper Dhading had suffered far more than they had. They explained that this tension evolved recently as the host community saw their new neighbours becoming increasingly dependent on relief, while they continued to work to support themselves. Those from the host community commented that *'these people in the settlement boast that they have a room full of food.'* Incomers mentioned that this rising tension has led them to feel vulnerable. For example, women from the resettlement area said that people from the market area would come to their community and steal things, especially because they *'know we have aid items'*. The pastor in the community said *'people from the settlements are scared of starting issues with the locals, out of concern that people will come and steal from them. Either this, or they come back drunk later and start a fight.'*



Settlement for people from upper Dhading established on common land in lower Dhading

Generally, people derived the most significant support from their caste and ethnic groups. Immediately after the earthquake, people in central Dhading and lower Gorkha said that they gathered in their caste groups to find temporary shelter in animal sheds or other structures. Similarly when whole villages relocated they stayed together in their neighbourhood support groups. Initially primarily a source of emotional support. Many people said that even though they feared the aftershocks and further earthquakes, living in these groups made them feel safe, even when sleeping outside and in unlocked shelters. As one man in the Kathmandu Valley described, *'safety means being with family.'* Women in upper Gorkha expressed a similar sentiment when discussing walking alone at night, saying, *'what is there to be scared of? We are all family.'*

As time passed, people said that they also depended on these groups for practical support including sharing labour or borrowing money.

Though people tended to live separately in these groupings, there was no clear tension or discrimination between them. This extended to a number of communities in Dhading, who had significant Christian and non-Christian communities. The only exception to this was in central Dhading, where we observed that many elderly high caste people would not take food from Dalits, although children did not care.

Communities that used traditional labour sharing arrangements had been able to move forward with construction, whereas most other communities had not. The most successful example of this was shared by people in a Tamang community in central Dhading where all houses had completely collapsed. One member of this community explained that he doesn't *'believe in the government and did not want to wait to rebuild. You never know when you'll get the money [from the Government] but you need a house now.'* In lower Gorkha, families also said that they would share labour between families through a traditional *mela* system, though they emphasized that this sharing happened exclusively within caste groups. In upper Gorkha, people told us of a few instances where the *'poorest families'* exchanged labour with their neighbours to help clear rubble and do other manual work. However, a number of people said that the large number of young people working abroad meant that many older people could not benefit from this as they did not have anyone in their family who could work on their behalf. Many older people across locations confirmed this and noted that they were waiting for their younger family members to come, often from Kathmandu, to help them rebuild.

Though living close to family members comforted people, they also mentioned that sharing such a small space within a temporary shelter also complicated their mourning rituals. In these situations, adhering to the custom that people in mourning should not be touched was particularly difficult. Similarly, many more people shared a kitchen and cooking duties than usual, making it harder for those in mourning to exclude salt and other spices from their diet.

## Emotional coping

On an emotional level, those who had not lost family members had a more positive and pragmatic outlook on their situation, saying things like *'we haven't lost a loved one. If we are alive, we can earn money'*. People returned to these ideas often in conversation, considering themselves lucky compared to those mourning or who had died. In less remote locations, people often compared their circumstances to villages that were harder hit high in the mountains, or to central Kathmandu where they knew many buildings had collapsed. These rationalisations, along with what was described as harder times during the Maoist insurgency, seemed to contribute to these people appearing resilient.

Despite this, many people were still struggling to emotionally cope with what they had experienced. Unsurprisingly, people who had lost family members found it difficult to move forward with their lives, including resuming their livelihoods as well as rebuilding their homes. Across all locations, we observed that young children and the elderly were struggling the most with the emotional aftermath of the earthquake. Older people repeatedly shared that they had planned to live the rest of their lives in their homes, and found the concept of reconstruction emotionally difficult. Many older people also were extremely worried about their



**Temporary health post built in Central Gorkha to replace the health post that collapsed in the first quake.**

children living in other villages. Though they did have some concerns about them living far away before the earthquake, now many older people said that this was a significant source of anxiety for them, saying *'this fear is making us suffer more'*.

Despite the veneer of resilience, health workers shared that other people in their communities were struggling perhaps more than they admitted. In central Dhading, one health worker said that there were ten miscarriages in the month after the earthquake, which was 'unusually high.' In other locations, health workers told us that a higher number of people were coming to them complaining about depression. One woman explained, *'they are still afraid of the earthquake, people are still afraid even when a bus goes by'*. They said that all they could do was to provide anti-depressants to people, as counselling was not available. Other health workers said there had been a rise in asthma and respiratory illness following the earthquake, and we also noticed that people were *'always coughing'*.

Beyond psychological trauma, we observed some who particularly struggled with the living situation following the earthquake. Top among these were the elderly, who people told us were more vulnerable to cold and uncomfortable sleeping conditions, as well as more dependent on the support of their families and communities in terms of both care and labour. People with large families also struggled, as temporary shelters were often too small to accommodate many people comfortably. In addition, people responsible for caring for injured family members also struggled to move on with their lives as they had to devote significant time and resources to providing this care.

*'One boy in the Kathmandu Valley had been watching cartoons when the earthquake happened. He ended up losing his father in the quake, and his mother said that he is scared to watch cartoons again because 'he thinks that if he does, another earthquake will happen.'*

**Field Notes, Kathmandu Valley**

Across locations, we observed significant generational differences in people's attitudes toward change, especially those who had relocated from upper Dhading. Older people often complained that it was *'difficult to stay'*, in the location where they had resettled, saying that they missed their old houses, livestock and village. Many said they see their villages *'in their dreams'*. However, younger people, particularly teenagers, repeatedly told us that they actually preferred to live closer to the market town. They enjoyed having more schools and shops and cheaper prices for most goods. They said there were few opportunities for them in their home village as one said, referring to her home village, *'there are fifty unemployed SLC graduates'*. Many of these teenagers said they had always planned to work abroad, so living in lower Dhading closer to agencies made this easier. They also liked the fact that they do not have to tend to livestock or gather wood, and instead have goods and food provided by aid agencies. *'If we had to harvest on our own'*, one woman commented, *'it would be hard work again'*.

In conversations, teenagers and people in their early twenties across locations were also focused more on moving forward than older generations. They often focused on receiving the reconstruction benefits the government had announced. They said these would be given to those with *'fully damaged'* homes, and discussed how they would use this cash in the future to build their own homes or to go abroad. These young people did not have the burden of caring for children or elderly family members. Though they recognised the trauma and sadness of older generations at losing their homes and sometimes family members, they did not internalise this trauma in the same way and, to some extent, saw the money coming from the government as an opportunity that they would not have had otherwise.

In a number of locations, we observed that people used alcohol to cope with this stress and trauma, particularly in Dhading. In Upper Gorkha, a group of women told us that after the earthquake, they wanted to drink but struggled because their stores of alcohol were trapped in their homes. While in some locations, people told us that drinking behaviour was no different than before the quakes, other people said it had increased. One woman in the Kathmandu Valley who sold alcohol from her home said that consumption rose significantly following the earthquake, *'maybe because people were scared'*. Though it had reduced by the time of our visit, she said it was still higher than before the earthquake. One extreme example of alcohol abuse came from lower Dhading, where a woman neighbour said that her husband *'started drinking a lot'* after their daughter was killed in the earthquake. The family had migrated down from upper Dhading and this had also put them in financial stress. During our visit, she received phone calls every night from people telling her he was drunk and asking her to come get him from the market. Even though *'he screamed bad words at her'* when he was drinking, she said that *'this was out of her hands and no one can talk to him'*.

# Unanticipated Consequences

08

*'I don't want to go back home....it would be hard to work again.'*

- A woman from Upper Dhading now living in Lower Dhading

## Labour costs and shortages

People across all locations shared that one of the most significant changes following the earthquake was the cost of manual labour, especially in construction and transport. This was most commonly explained by the fact that there were not enough labourers available to meet the demand for construction. Additionally, this was compounded by the fact that higher skilled labour was necessary to demolish damaged houses, as this required more specific skills than regular construction. Along with this, in a number of locations people also explained that the relatively few labourers that were available demanded higher wages for demolishing and reconstruction work as they considered this work to be unusually risky. As one man in lower Gorkha explained *'labourers were charging more as they didn't want to go into damaged houses'*. Table 66 below presents daily wages in different locations before and after the earthquake.

**TABLE 6: DAILY LABOUR RATES FOR CONSTRUCTION BEFORE AND AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE**

Location	Before earthquake	After earthquake
Upper Gorkha	250-300	450-500
Central Dhading	N/A	800 (skilled construction)
Lower Gorkha	600	800-1000
Lower Dhading	N/A	'double' previous wage

Beyond these changes in the labour supply, people in upper Gorkha also attributed these high daily rates to the fact that aid programmes had paid labourers over twice the normal daily wage (NPR 1175) to participate in a road re-construction project. Many people in the village, including the Police, were upset that these rates had been so high, as now *'labourers only want to work for that amount of money'*. Some people simply could not afford to pay these higher wages; others who were willing to pay could not find anyone willing to work. In many cases, labour had to be sourced from other villages to clear rubble. This further increased the price as *'you also needed to pay for food and transport for them'*.

Despite the fact that there was so little labour available, people shared only a few examples of construction training programmes or other such initiatives. One exception was in central Dhading, where people told us an *'organisation'* was providing training to *'teach people how to build safer houses'*. Although six people from each ward were selected to attend who *'already had some labour skills'*, people told us that only three people from their ward had attended. People speculated that the low participation in the training could be explained by the fact that it took place during harvest season.

The reluctance to rebuild houses because of these inflated costs impacted those who were in the construction industry but who did not construct homes. For example one neighbour in lower Gorkha who worked as a finishing



**Temporary shelters where classes are being held in the Kathmandu Valley**

carpenter said, *'work has stopped completely.'* He was concerned that people would only begin to rebuild in a few years' time. He explained that *'I will be too old by then. If I were younger, I would have more work by the time rebuilding starts.'*

## School disruption

Across all sites, people said that one of the most significant disruptions to daily life following the earthquake was the change in schooling arrangements for children. In all locations, schools had either completely collapsed, or were significantly damaged. Most schools were closed for between 35 days (lower Gorkha and central Dhading) and five months (upper Gorkha) following the earthquake. During this time, people in Upper Gorkha said that *'children were doing nothing,'* as no alternative learning centres were set up. When children did return to school, some schools gave short term counselling (central Dhading), while others did not.

At the time of our visit, schools in some locations moved classes outside or into temporary shelters. However, in a number of locations we observed that communities continued to hold classes in school buildings that had sustained significant damage from the earthquake. This was the case in lower Gorkha, where classes were being held in a building that had been declared *'completely destroyed'* by technical teams. While in central Dhading people said that the community had received NPR10lakhs from the Government to reconstruct the school, this funding only covered the cost of the foundation and pillars, and there were no plans for future funding to cover the rest.

Despite being traumatised from the earthquake and scared of future ones, for the most part people felt that children were coping well with this disruption and did not mind having classes in temporary shelters. The most significant disruption was for children from upper Dhading now living in lower Dhading, who struggled to take courses and socialise in Nepali as many only had a basic understanding of the language. Teachers there also said that these children also often left school in the middle of the day, saying *'relief has come, we must go and collect it'*. Their poor performance in school was exacerbated, they said, by the fact that many parents had returned to their home villages to tend to livestock, and were not present to force their children to attend school.



Debris from where a school used to be in upper Gorkha

### Box: Schooling in Upper Gorkha

The school in upper Gorkha was completely destroyed. Given that many schools nearby were being repaired and temporary structures were being rebuilt over time, people explained that children would spend a few months at school in one village, then move to a different village as another building became available where classes could be held. Both villages where children had gone so far were 1.5 hours walk away, so children stayed with family members who lived closer during the week and only returned home on the weekends. This distance combined with people's fear about another earthquake meant that many parents opted to only send their children to the ad hoc, informal classes held in the village rather than to formal school. One woman explained this, saying that they *'preferred for their children to be close to them'*, despite admitting that these classes were not as good as those held in other villages.



**What next?**

**09**

# People's Expectations

This section begins by examining people's expectations for external assistance and then discusses people's own immediate and long term plans.

## Expectations from government

*'Big organisations did research but not anything useful. Helicopters dropped things but then when we opened it, it was only toothbrushes. The biggest problem is that whatever has been done is for the short term. Nothing has been done to make us capable in the long term. We want employment opportunities and our livelihoods not goods.'*

- Man, Upper Dhading

Across locations, people strongly felt that it was the Government's role to support their recovery going forward; the comment that *'the Government should help,'* heard widely. For many people, these expectations stemmed from the future benefits that the government had announced, including the NPR 2 lakhs per family intended support reconstruction. However, people in central Dhading and upper Gorkha were worried that this would never come. People in Upper Gorkha shared this concern, particularly as they also had not received their NPR 15k benefit. People in central Dhading criticised central Government specifically, saying they had *'gotten away easily'* by only providing the NPR 15k benefit. People in other locations also echoed this sentiment, saying *'the Government has done nothing for us'.*

Despite these criticisms, in all locations people were focused on other benefits promised by the Government, including the 2lakh benefit and the NPR 25lakh loan programme. However, people's understanding of this programme differed widely, with some believing they would receive NPR 25lakhs as a cash grant and others viewing it as a loan. Among those who thought it was a loan, there was additional confusion about the interest rate, whether collateral was required and, if so, how much. While no one in any location could explain how to go about getting this benefit, people often described the money coming from the Government in the future as what would finally enable them to rebuild their homes.

In addition, some people also expected cash transfers of NPR 7-1000 to buy winter clothing though many were sceptical that this would ever come. People in upper Gorkha said this benefit would not be useful as *'there is no place here to buy clothes.'* Others mentioned rumours of a programme to provide subsidized timber for reconstruction.

Overall, people generally did not express particular expectations of political parties to provide support in the future. The only people who did were people who were party members who expected that the parties would have helped them more already.

### Government of Nepal's commitment to Reconstruction

Soon after the first earthquake, the Government of Nepal announced they would provide NPR 2 lakhs in relief assistance for each family or household who wanted to rebuild their houses. Under the Earthquake Victim Special Loan Scheme, the Government committed to providing additional concessional loans (of up to NPR 2.5 lakhs for those in the valley and NPR 1.5 lakhs for those outside the valley) at an interest rate of 2.0% per annum to those whose houses have been declared uninhabitable. However, as of April 2016, news outlets reported that only six loans had been issued under this scheme.

# Expectations from other Organisations

While people primarily looked to the Government for future help, some also acknowledged the role of foreign aid and organisations in providing them support. In places that had received a significant amount of aid, particularly those living in the settlements in lower Dhading, people expected this support to continue. One mother, echoing others, said she was worried that the aid from these organisations would stop, but she *'didn't know what to do about this.'* She explained that people in the clusters were not preparing for their future because they expected aid to continue. This contrasted with local communities who had already begun to make plans for the future. A woman in the local community expressed a similar feeling, saying that people living in the clusters *'will stay as long as the aid is still there.'*

In Upper Gorkha people also looked forward to receiving additional aid in the future beyond that promised by the Government. One older neighbour reflected on this, saying that the community has become *'a bit ruined by foreigners who start giving things. People now start to expect things to come in from everywhere.'* The chairperson of the aid committee in Upper Gorkha echoed this same feeling, saying *'we never had to ask anyone for anything, now we have become beggars.'*

However in both central Dhading and lower Gorkha people did not have any expectations that any support would come from external organisations. These places had received fewer relief materials than Upper Gorkha and people in lower Dhading living in the clusters, were less remote, and also suffered less damage from the quake. Similarly, people in the Kathmandu Valley did expect support from the Red Cross to continue, except for winter clothing.

# Expectations from the Nepal Police

*'How do you expect us to do rescue work when there is no training on this?'*

- Police, Urban Kathmandu

People described the Nepal Police in either neutral or negative terms. In central Dhading, people recalled their experiences with the police during the insurgency period, particularly the harassment and accusations of being Maoist sympathisers. In lower Gorkha and Upper Gorkha relations were better, though people in these places saw the police as outsiders (who do not speak the local language) who were rarely seen rather than being *'here to protect us.'* Given this context, people generally did not see the police as a source of help or security and did not expect anything from them in the future.

# People's immediate and long term plans

*'2072 is a bad year.'* - Families in the Kathmandu Valley considering rebuilding

When talking about their future, people tended to divide their thoughts into short term and long term periods. In the short term, people in all locations were focused on surviving the winter. They had plans to try to

insulate their shelters with blankets, bamboo and mud, but feared the new experience of sleeping outside of their homes during the coldest season. People with damaged homes said they were increasingly moving their entire families inside these structures to try to stay warm and expected the weather to grow colder over the coming months.

Though recovery meant different things to different people depending on how they'd been affected by the earthquake, people often returned to the theme of uncertainty when discussing their future in the long term. For people in the most severely affected locations in upper Gorkha and Dhading, recovery meant having certainty about where they would be living in the future. In both locations, people repeatedly emphasized that they first needed to know where they would be living before they could move on. People in upper Gorkha believed that the Government may relocate them as their village had been assessed as too dangerous to stay in, but no one knew where, when, or how this would happen. One family in Gorkha explained the anxiety that this uncertainty caused, saying, *'even if the government wants to resettle us they will only give us a house. We don't need a house, we need a livelihood.'*

This concern was even greater for people from upper Dhading living in the temporary settlements. Many people here said that they believed that they would be forced to move soon. People commented that the idea of going back to their village scared them, as they did not know what future disaster might happen. One man described this, saying *'if we go back we are on our own but while we are down in this settlement we are the government's responsibility.'* As this community had come to rely on relief and aid, many found the idea of losing access to this external support to be an especially daunting prospect.



**Cluster area in lower Dhading where people from upper Dhading have settled**

This uncertainty was also an obstacle to people's ability to move forward with their lives. One man living in the settlements described this, saying, *'because people want to chase us out, we are still living in temporary shelters. We haven't had the opportunity to think for the future. That is why we haven't brought our cattle and many belongings from the village.'*

In more moderately affected areas, people focused on their immediate livelihood needs and left thoughts of rebuilding for the future. One woman in central Dhading described their decision to return to work and her daily routine out of necessity, saying *'if we don't work, we can't feed our children.'* Similarly, we observed that people in a number of locations were becoming more accustomed to living in their partially damaged homes, as many people expressed more immediate concern about finding jobs rather than *'living in a tent.'* One man contextualised his current situation in terms of the insurgency, saying *'living outside now is easier.'* During the insurgency, many people *'had to leave their village for a few months.'* After the earthquake *'we are only living outside and have plenty to eat,'* rather than facing threats from both the Maoists and the army.

People whose homes were only partially damaged were particularly focused on resuming their livelihoods. This was most common for people from the Kathmandu Valley, for whom recovery meant going back to jobs in Kathmandu that had been on hold in factories, construction and hotels.

In the long term, people in all locations were clear that rebuilding their homes was the ultimate sign of recovery. However, despite their serious concerns about the upcoming winter, most people did not have any immediate plans to rebuild their homes and discussed this only as a long-term plan.

Beyond inflated labour prices, there were a number of reasons for this. It was clear that people's priority was to live without fear so people argued that the safest decision was to not rebuild. Many people worried that they might build the 'wrong' kind of house, which, at worst, might succumb to a future earthquake. This was compounded by the fact that many locations were still experiencing aftershocks, so *'it might not be safe yet'* to rebuild. People across all locations also commented that 2072 was an inauspicious year to build a house. These concerns were particularly strong in the new municipalities (central Dhading, lower Gorkha), where extra building regulations complicated this decision. A number of families said that municipalities *'require you to follow specific building codes, including having blueprints approved.'* In lower Gorkha, notices were posted saying that *'if you don't follow the building codes, the municipality will prosecute you according to the law.'* In both locations people mentioned that they did not know what these codes were, creating an additional barrier to rebuilding.



**View of village in upper Gorkha composed of temporary shelters**

Though this was not stated explicitly, researchers got a sense that the earthquake marked the first time that people had considered that their homes, made solidly of stones, could actually collapse. People across locations said that they would only build one storey houses in the future and would use wood or CGI sheet, rather than the revert to the traditional two-storey mud and stone houses. However, people in Upper Gorkha said that building in this way is not something they have done before, and *'depends on people's capability to learn to build in this way.'* Though people in lower Gorkha also preferred this new way of building, they were concerned that a one storey

house would require more land, as livestock would need a separate structure rather than occupying the ground floor as they do in two storey structures. No one knew where they would be able to find this extra land let alone afford it. Similarly, people in the Kathmandu Valley were confused as where they should rebuild their new home. One family explained that they felt that they now had the right to use both the land where their original home was, as well as where they had relocated their shelter, and didn't know where they should live in the future.

However, others like those living in central Dhading mentioned that they planned to rebuild only when they receive the expected benefits from the government. People consistently noted that they needed this extra money for reconstruction, especially to cover elevated labour costs. One of the biggest challenges is that rubble must be cleared and houses demolished before a new house can be built. One man in lower Dhading told us that clearing the rubble would cost NPR 30,000, while the house he owned before the earthquake would have only sold for NPR 60,000. Because of this, people in all districts also told us that they did not expect the NPR 2lakhs from the Government to fully cover the cost of reconstruction. In central Dhading, people told us that they *'would rebuild whatever they can of their property with the 2lakhs,'* which may end up being a smaller or partially finished house. For families here as well as in many other locations, the expectation of benefits from the government, combined with people's overall uncertainty regarding when, how and even if this would ever come, pushed reconstruction plans even further into the future.

# Study Implications

Over the course of our study, people shared openly about their experiences of the earthquakes. Researchers gave time to empathise and really listen; the fact that researchers had also experienced the quakes enabled them to be sensitive and thoughtful in their interactions. The following implications are drawn from the many careful conversations that formed the basis of this study, with different generations, in different families and across the study locations. This section intends to convey their thoughts rather than our interpretations.

Across all locations, people worries immediately following the earthquake were for their loved ones. Having a means to contact them, even if only through a text message, was vital. For frontline service providers like the police and health workers, it was difficult to focus on the emergency tasks until they had established the safety of their own families. Access to mobile phones is very high in Nepal and ensuring that this line of communication is operating for both personal and radio communications is a priority.

People were critical of but mostly resigned to what they considered to be the delayed and inadequate response of the police. While securing their communications capability (e.g. satellite phones, internet) may have helped in coordinate early responses, the police felt they were not adequately trained to respond in an emergency or to serve such vast areas. Their lack of local language skills posed an additional problem. In the absence of a formal rescue or immediate response, neighbours depended on each other to cope in the immediate aftermath of the first quake.

Early external support in remote mountainous areas came in the form of food drops, though people did not identify these as particularly useful or important. Most communities have local shops with supplies and most households keep food stocks. Though some stocks were trapped inside collapsed houses, those who could access their stocks readily shared them with their neighbours. As people in all locations were most concerned about shelter, tarpaulins were by far the most appreciated relief materials in the early aftermath.

There were many rumours and inconsistent messages throughout the relief process. These led to some people missing out on aid they needed, others exploiting the distribution process, and tensions and jealousies arising. The Government's cash transfer scheme was simple to grasp in general and people appreciated it. However, in practice the eligibility criteria were opaque, with levels of damage largely open to local interpretation. People felt that a fairer system would have been if cash transfers had been made based on the number of people living in the house and destruction of productive assets and food stocks. External organisations made special allocations for caste and ethnic groups based on assumptions about their socio-economic status, which local people felt were often unjustified. People mentioned that a fairer system would allocate aid based on a family's number of dependents and capacity to cope (livelihood and subsistence).

In addition to encouraging greater two way communication and listening to people's real time needs, relief materials would have been more useful in both substance and timing if organisations had been more aware of cultural norms. Some supplies were simply inappropriate and much was duplicated. The provision of CGI sheets was too late. Organisations also caused problems for the local economy by providing relief goods which were anyway available and that people had the cash to purchase. Organisations who paid higher wages for workers (in demolition, clearing up and reconstruction) than normal were partially responsible for the spike in labour costs in some places, making it prohibitively costly for many people to rebuild.

The elderly, particularly those without immediate family support, found it hard to cope with conditions in temporary shelters and to support themselves economically. Older people often did not know about their entitlements and depended on others to secure them. They often have had to wait the longest for support

from official aid or the return of their own family members who were often living outside of the village. They were clearly the most traumatised after the earthquake and most likely to suffer health consequences. Support systems for the short and long term are needed as well as particular provisions made for improved preparedness for them in case of future disasters.

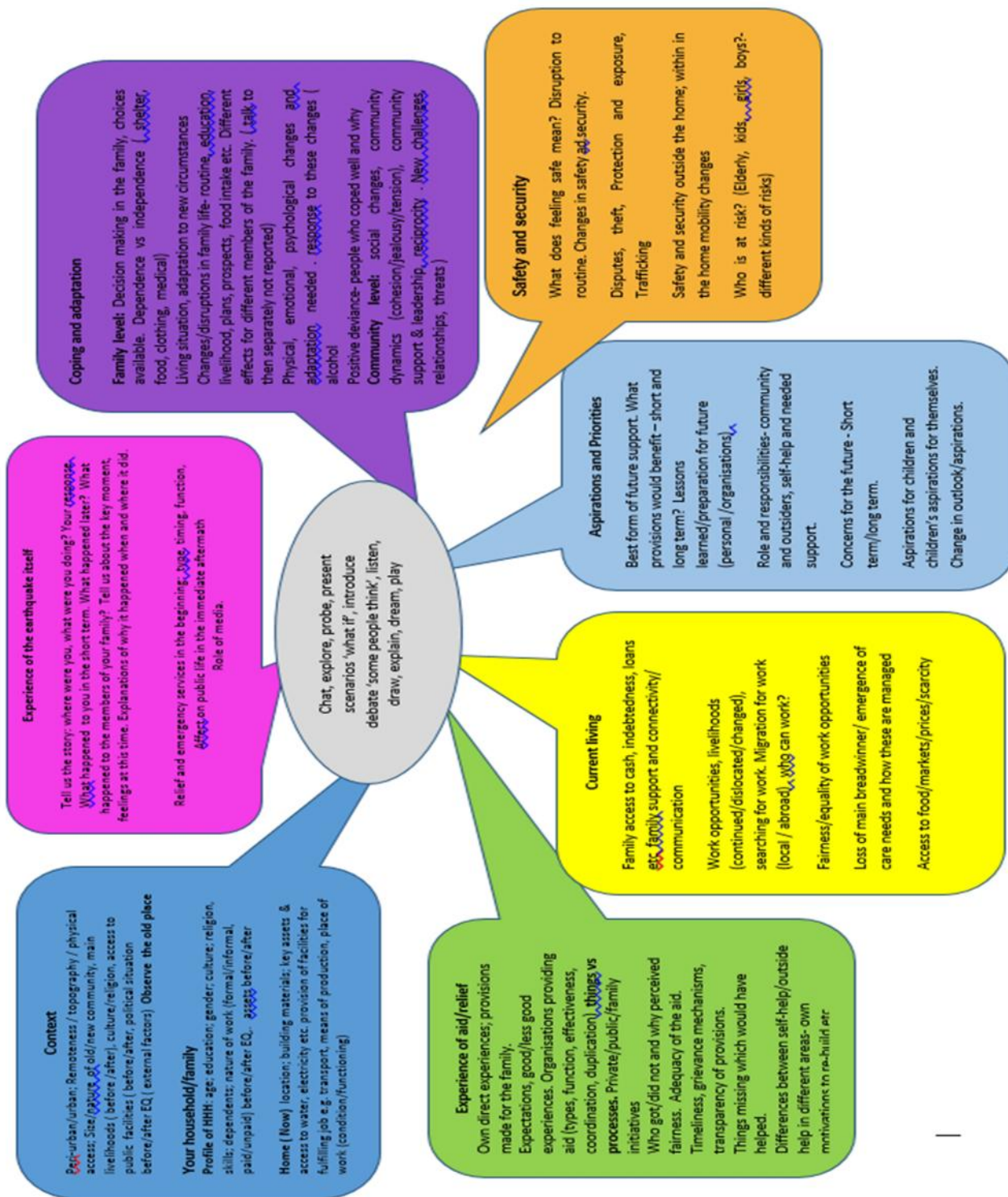
Clear, simple information and advice on earthquake resilient construction is an urgent need together with support to meet new building regulations and clarity on the Government's offer of loans for reconstruction so that people can get on with rebuilding homes and businesses. People in resettlement camps included in this study have come to depend on aid, though their ability to plan for their future is limited by their uncertainty as to where they will be living in the long term. Assisting these people back into work is a priority most of them share.

**Annexes**

**10**



# Annex I: Areas of Conversation



# Annex II: Research Team

Stage	Role	Name
Research Design	Lead	Danielle Stein
	Contributors	Dee Jupp Arya Guatam
Scouting (Kathmandu)	Members	Neha Koirala Arya Gautam Pooja Koirala Shalinta Sigdel Abijit Sharma
	Members	Neha Koirala Arya Gautam Bijay Kumar Shahi Toran Singh
Team A (Gorkha)	Team Leader	Arya Gautam
	Members	Bijay Chettri Kshitiz Khanal
Team B (Gorkha and Dhading)	Team Leader	Neha Koirala (Gorkha)
	Members	Toran Singh Ram Chandra Adhikari Samin Rijal (Dhading)
Team C (Urban: Kathmandu and Dhading)	Team Leader	Bijay Kumar Shahi
	Members	Subita Pradhan Vijaya Pun (Kathmandu) Ashish Shrestha (Kathmandu) Diksha Mahara (Dhading) Kristi Maskey (Dhading)
Sense Making (Kathmandu)	Members	Neha Koirala Arya Gautam Bijay Kumar Shahi Kshitiz Khanal
	Lead Writer	Danielle Stein
Report Drafting	Contributors	Dee Jupp

## Annex III: List of people met

People	Female	Male	Total
HHH Adults	34	24	58
HHH Children	7	13	20
FHH Adults	115	103	218
FHH Children	34	39	73
School Principal	0	7	7
Teachers	6	17	23
Shop Owner	20	17	37
NGO Worker	0	2	2
Political Party Worker	2	17	19
Government Worker	0	2	2
Primary Students	24	25	49
Secondary Students	19	24	43
Health Workers	3	5	8
Farmers - Land Owner	20	67	87
Farmers - Share Cropper	2	9	11
Farmers - Daily Labour	4	8	12
Daily Labour - Others	2	10	12
Transport Operators	0	10	10
Police Officers	0	8	8
Army Officers	0	0	0
APF Officers	0	2	2
Other	15	7	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>723</b>

\* Other includes health post office helper, Vice President of the community based electricity board, pastor, INGO worker and a youth club member.