

Nepal earthquake

Key messages

- The devastating effects of the earthquake in Nepal are a clear indicator of the need for greater international investment in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster preparedness in Nepal.
- Governments should set an achievable target for increasing financing for DRR as part of total Official Development Assistance (ODA) at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July 2015.
- Investing as much as possible in local Nepalese capacities and encouraging international-national partnerships will ensure faster recovery and improve aid performance.
- There is an urgent need to increase the inclusion of Nepalese NGOs in the UN cluster system to ensure that best use is made of local expertise and that international efforts complement local capacities and do not undermine them.
- Christian Aid urges international donors, governments, INGOs and the UN to provide funding for local and national as well as international actors and to make their financing mechanisms more accessible to Nepalese NGOs.

Introduction

An earthquake of 7.8 magnitude hit Nepal on 25 April, affecting 8 million people in 39 of 75 districts around the country, especially in the central and western regions. Thousands of people have died in the disaster, and over 500,000 houses have been destroyed or damaged. The most affected districts are Gorkha, Kathmandu, Nuwakot, Dhading and Lalitpur. The Nepalese Government declared a state of emergency and has called for international assistance. An L3 emergency, the most severe level of emergency, has been declared by the UN system.

Neighbouring governments provided immediate support with search and rescue teams, and international aid began to arrive three days after the earthquake struck. However, aid delivery has been slow and people stranded in remote villages and towns across Nepal were still waiting for aid and relief to arrive days after the earthquake. The Nepalese government has acknowledged many flaws in the aid operation.

Hospitals in Kathmandu are overwhelmed, 3 million people are estimated to be in need of food assistance, 4.2 million people are in need of water and sanitation services and around 24,000 internally displaced people are hosted in 13 camps in Kathmandu.¹

As the monsoon season is due to hit Nepal in June, the need to provide shelter, household materials and health services to the affected population is even more urgent.

While the international response will be crucial, the humanitarian sector should apply the lessons learnt in previous emergencies and give local actors a central role in relief and recovery. If national NGOs, local government offices and community-based organisations lead the response, supported by international entities, then humanitarian assistance can move from service delivery to empowering local capacities. This disaster is yet another confirmation of the urgent need to increase funding for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in Nepal and other disaster-prone countries.

The need for more investment in DRR

Nepal is considered one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.² Due to its vulnerability to natural hazards, DRR and disaster management policies and practices have been prioritised in Nepal since the 1980s.³ Despite the government's efforts, the devastating effects of the earthquake are a clear indicator of the need for greater support.

The establishment of National Emergency Operation Centers (NEOCs) in 47 districts was one of the great achievements of Nepal's DRR policies in the last five years, as it decentralised disaster response capacities to district level. A confirmation of this is the fact that NEOCs played an important role in the first hours after the 25 April earthquake, in providing information on the magnitude of the disaster to the central government, coordinating search and rescue efforts and providing leadership for the response to the disaster.⁴

Despite the high level of expertise in disaster management achieved at district level, more needs to be done to increase community resilience to natural hazards in Nepal. Increasing people's knowledge, tackling urban poverty and enforcing modern building codes can lessen vulnerability to earthquakes, which are among the most deadly natural hazards.

The lower casualty rates of earthquakes in Chile and Japan in comparison to Haiti,⁵ despite being of a higher magnitude, show that including risk reduction policies and practices in all sectors of society can considerably reduce earthquake damages.

Compliance to the recently designed 'Sendai Framework' will be crucial to improving risk-reduction and mitigation efforts, and the state's responsibility will be of primary importance. However, considering Nepal's limited capacities this should be further enhanced by international support. Nepal's annual spending on DRR grew from US\$8 million to US\$40 million between 2005 and 2013.⁶ Christian Aid urges the UN, EU and all international donors to increase their support for DRR in Nepal, so that compliance to the new 'Sendai Framework' can be achieved.

Evidence shows that investing in disaster preparedness is not only crucial to save lives and limit damages, it is also cost-effective.⁷ Arguably, the US\$415 million for life-saving assistance that UNOCHA is seeking for the next three months⁸ (10 times the spending for DRR in Nepal in 2013), could have saved thousands of lives had it been invested in disaster prevention before this earthquake. Christian Aid allocates 10% of the funds collected through emergency appeals to DRR and to building more resilient societies in the countries struck by disasters. We urge international donors and governments to apply the same policy to the funds pledged for Nepal in the coming months.

The Nepal disaster provides further evidence for the need to increase funding for DRR as part of total Official Development Assistance (ODA). As we approach the International Conference on Financing for Development⁹ in Addis Ababa in July, we urge governments to set an achievable and ambitious target for increasing financing for DRR. By investing more before disasters strike, the international community will save more lives as well as saving money by reducing the cost of responding to disasters.

Partnership approach to improve relief operations in Nepal

DRR and disaster management have received much attention in Nepal in the last decade. Nepalese people and local communities are well aware of these issues.

It is fundamental that the international response makes the most of this local knowledge and works closely with disaster-affected communities and local authorities. Voices of people affected by the earthquake should be included in the response and recovery programming. This will ensure their needs are more efficiently met, and ensure the humanitarian sector is more accountable to the people it supports.

Many studies have demonstrated how partnership with local actors has great potential in contributing to humanitarian performance. Specifically, partnership can increase aid effectiveness, aid appropriateness and its connectedness to long-term development.¹⁰

The urgency of humanitarian actions should not undermine the importance of the recovery phase. Consulting local affected communities about their priorities and needs, and encouraging local NGOs and government structures to lead the response, can help strengthen the connection between humanitarian aid and long-term development processes. Relying as much as possible on Nepalese capacities and encouraging international-national partnerships will ensure faster recovery, lessen aid dependency and improve humanitarian aid performance.

Inclusion of local NGOs

It is crucial that the UN cluster system established in Nepal does not fail, as it did in previous emergencies, to engage with local actors.¹¹ Immediately including local NGOs in the clusters and embedding clusters with relevant line ministries will help to gather more information on the needs of remote communities, on available resources (accommodation and offices, translators, vehicles) and on road conditions, and will avoid duplication of efforts. This, in turn, can increase the coverage and pertinence of the response.

At the moment very few Nepalese organisations are part of the clusters (5 out of 43 agencies), which are heavily dominated by the UN and INGOs as in previous emergencies.¹² It is crucial that the cluster system develops suitable approaches to include national NGOs. This could be done during the emergency, as well as subsequently for future preparedness, for example by deploying a senior UNOCHA official whose job is to ensure the inclusion of local NGOs and networks in every future L3 emergency.¹³ In addition, international or national cluster liaison officers can notify local organisations and government structures about the existence and objectives of cluster meetings through information campaigns. This would allow a move away from a top-down approach and would allow the engagement of a wider source of local knowledge, information and expertise.

Christian Aid welcomes the 'Flash Appeal' launched by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and UNOCHA on 29 April to respond to the earthquake; however funds will be mainly distributed directly to INGOs and UN agencies.¹⁴ In order to increase the proximity to affected communities and the relevance of the response, Christian Aid strongly urges international donors, governments, INGOs and the UN to establish financing mechanisms and contract requirements that will make future funds for this emergency more accessible to Nepalese NGOs (according to their capacities to absorb funds and to expand operations). Directly financing local implementing NGOs will provide value for money and empower Nepalese actors.¹⁵

The international humanitarian community cannot make the same mistake of overriding local civil society and structures, as happened in Haiti (2010)¹⁶ and the Philippines (2013). If the response and the recovery phase support the strengthening of local organisations and government structures, the humanitarian sector can finally move from internationally led actions towards locally owned response.

Christian Aid's response to the earthquake

Christian Aid is currently supporting 6,400 affected households in Kathmandu Valley, Dhading, Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk districts through ACT Alliance members such as The Lutheran World Federation and existing Christian Aid partners including PGVS. The first phase of the response will include the provision of water purification units and hygiene kits, hygiene promotion, emergency shelters, first aid and health clinics, food and non-food items.

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Endnotes

1. Nepal: Earthquake 2015, Situation Report No 7 (as of 30 April 2015), and Nepal: Earthquake 2015 Situation Report No. 9 (as of 2 May 2015), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)
2. His Excellency Mahendra Bahadur Pandey, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, speech at the Plenary Meeting of the Third World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), 15 March 2015, Sendai, Japan. webtv.un.org/watch/mahendra-bahadur-pandey-nepal-4th-plenary-meeting/4112211323001
3. The 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) provided valuable guidance to incorporate disaster risk management approaches in Nepal's development processes. In 2011, the Nepalese Government created the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC), through the support of international partners, with the aim of enhancing the efforts to reduce the country's vulnerability to disasters. Nepal's delegation played an important role in shaping the 'Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030', which is a clear indication of the country's commitment to ensure DRR remains on the agenda for the next 15 years.
4. "Emergency centres' pay off for real time updates, coordination," UNDP, 29 April 2015, np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/presscenter/articles/2015/04/29/nepal-s-emergency-centres-pay-off-for-real-time-updates-coordination/
5. Earthquake Hazard Program, earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/world_deaths.php
6. 'Nepal scrambles in aftermath of quake', 26 April 2015, UNISDR, undisdr.org/archive/43866
7. 'Disaster Mitigation is Cost Effective', Ilan Kelman, CICERO, Norway, 2014, bit.ly/1AK7AgR
8. 'Flash Appeal for Response to the Nepal Earthquake – April-July 2015', 29 April 2015, UNOCHA, humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/nepal_flash_appeal_0.pdf
9. un.org/esa/ffd/
10. 'Missed Opportunities: the case for strengthening national and local partnership-based humanitarian responses', September 2013, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam, Tearfund, Action Aid.
11. 'Missed Again: making space for partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan response', September 2014, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam, Tearfund, Action Aid.
12. Nepalese organizations represents only 11.6% of the total clusters agencies, Annex 2 of UNOCHA 'Flash Appeal', https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/nepal_flash_appeal_0.pdf
13. 'Making the World Humanitarian Summit worth the Climb', Christian Aid, December 2014, p9, christianaid.org.uk/Images/world-humanitarian-summit-report-december-2014.pdf
14. See note 8
15. 'Missed Again', pvii
16. 'Haiti earthquake: where is US aid money going? Get the data', The Guardian, 10 January 2014, theguardian.com/global-development/datablog/2014/jan/10/haiti-earthquake-us-aid-funding-data