

OVERVIEW

NEPAL 2015 / EARTHQUAKE

CRISIS Nepal earthquakes, 25 April and 12 May 2015

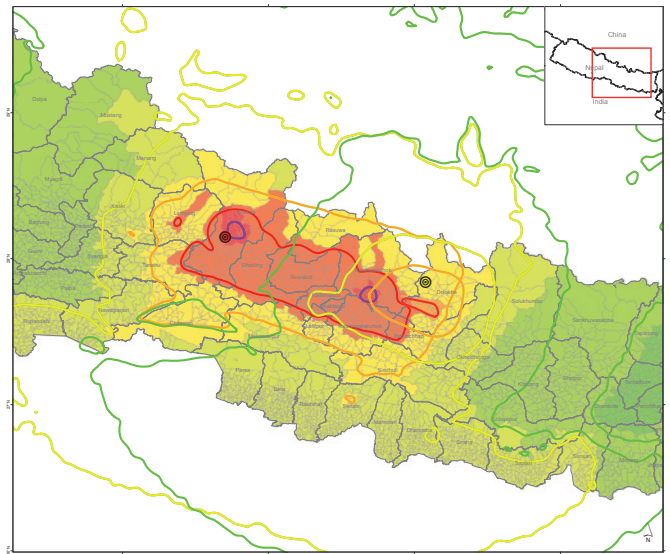
TOTAL HOUSES DAMAGED 604,930 fully damaged
288,856 destroyed
(Source: National Disaster Report 2015, Ministry of Home Affairs).

TOTAL PEOPLE AFFECTED 886,456 households affected
649,815 households displaced

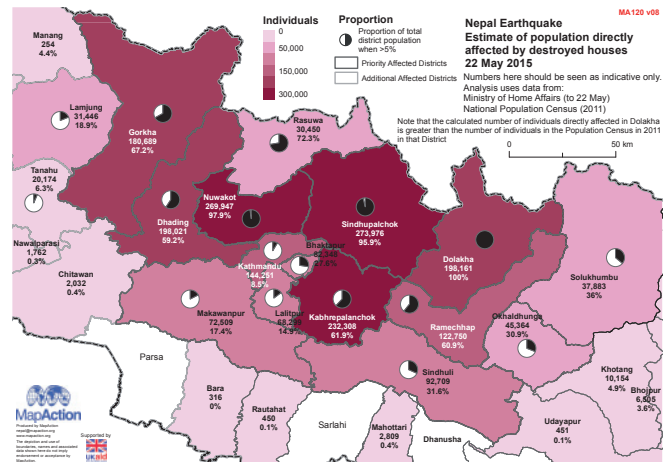
HOUSEHOLDS SUPPORTED Emergency phase: 700,000
Self-recovery phase: 600,000
Winterization: 244,158

RESPONSE OUTPUTS (households)

736,743 tarpaulins
402,070 blankets
484,765 Cash For Shelters
214,392 CGI Sheets Bundles



Location and intensity of the two major earthquakes (Source: Mapaction).



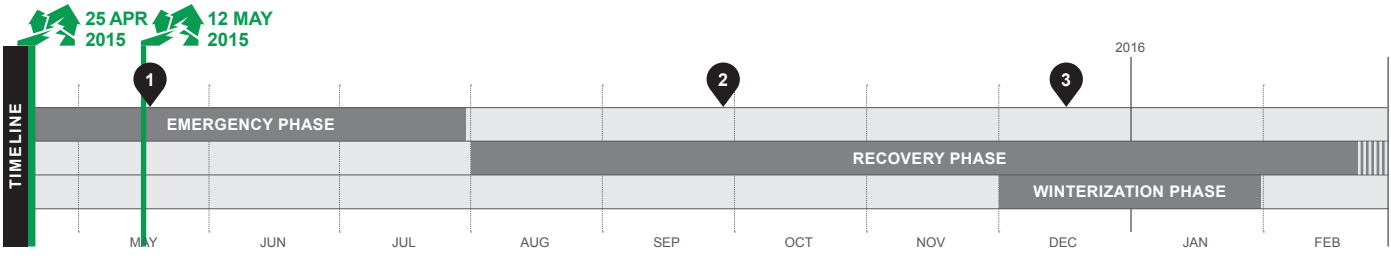
Estimate of population directly affected by destroyed houses - 22 May 2015 (Source: Mapaction). Damage varied greatly by location.



People inspect their homes, affected by the earthquake, to salvage materials and look for personal belongings.

SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

Two major earthquakes struck Nepal in April and May 2015, affecting around 6 million people. The government called for humanitarian assistance and the international community supported the response in the 14 most-affected districts, through three main phases: emergency relief, supporting self-recovery, and winterization. After the initial phase, characterized mainly by in-kind distributions, cash-based assistance became the preferred modality for this response.



- 1 Mid-May 2015: Cluster coordination set up at national level.
- 2 Late Sep 2015: Blockade imposed by the Government of India.
- 3 Dec 2015: Shelter Cluster handover.



The first step in the response is to assess the damage, and then clear the rubble to allow recovery efforts to start.

SITUATION BEFORE THE DISASTER

Nepal is significantly **at risk to natural disasters**, in particular climate change, earthquakes and flooding¹. Around 25.2% of its population live below the poverty line². **High poverty levels**, especially in rural areas, have led to significant migration of young men to cities and overseas (44% households have at least one absentee). This has also led to concerns about social and economic vulnerability of women left behind in the remote, hilly and mountain regions of rural Nepal that were most affected by the 2015 earthquakes.

Politically, the country was struggling to meet demands raised by different interest groups in a **peace process after a decade-long armed conflict**. Political transition and attainment of peace has overshadowed economic development and humanitarian issues. Rapid and unplanned urbanization, migration of youth, frequent street demonstrations and strikes, and lack of law and order have added to the humanitarian challenges. The residual effects of the conflict were still to be solved with rapid change in political, social and economic situation of the country, and affected both the earthquake response and recovery operations.

In a country that has experienced humanitarian responses to both natural disaster and conflict, the Government of Nepal has **invested significantly in institutional preparedness and coordination**. At the sectoral level, this meant that shelter agencies had a clear government partner and that there was overall government direction and ownership of the response, especially through the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction.

Prior to the 2015 earthquake, Nepal had worked to **improve housing regulations, settlement and land rights**, as well as promoting safer land usage and building practices through the introduction of land and building acts, codes and professional bodies. Despite this, **the vast majority of houses in rural Nepal were non-engineered and self-built**.

¹ Nepal country profile, <http://bit.ly/2kvizAI>.

² UNDP's human development index.

SITUATION AFTER THE DISASTER

On 25 April 2015, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, with its epicentre 81km north-west of the capital Kathmandu. This was followed on 12 May by a 7.3 magnitude earthquake that struck the district of Dolakha, leading to further loss of life and building damage, and increasing the humanitarian needs. A total of 8,857 people died, around 6 million people were directly affected.

Given the enormity of the destruction caused by the earthquakes and the threat of the coming Himalayan winter, a **major national and international response was mobilized**, including the activation of the cluster system. More than 300 organizations registered with the Shelter Cluster and the Nepal Government and private sector organizations. These reacted quickly and at scale, focusing on needs in the 14 priority districts for which the government had requested international assistance, **targeting 712,725 houses** (or 80% of the total damage to housing stock)³.

The large-scale destruction of housing resulted from the **seismic vulnerability of the predominant housing typology**, which consisted of unreinforced masonry, either low strength stone or brick masonry with mud mortar, without seismic-resilient features. Other common building types, such as cement-mortared masonry and reinforced-concrete frame buildings, were somewhat better off but still suffered significantly, due to deficiencies in material, design, detailing and craftsmanship. The traditional housing typologies were built, upgraded and expanded by the households themselves, with limited knowledge of seismic-safe techniques and standards.

Female members were generally doing the majority of the unskilled tasks involving carrying the water, collecting construction materials, mixing the mortar, digging the soil for the foundations or other housing components, while men or qualified builders actually managed the construction process. According to the government's Post Disaster Needs Assessment,

³ For more on the Cluster set-up and coordination structure, see case study A.4.



Many people were forced to relocate temporarily due to the destruction caused by the earthquakes. In some cases, entire villages had to build temporary structures near their destroyed or damaged homes.

about 26% of the damaged houses belonged to female-headed households, 41% to Dalits (belonging to the lowest caste) and indigenous communities, and 23% to senior citizens. **These groups were found to be disproportionately affected** by the earthquakes and were identified as the most vulnerable, due to their low socio-economic status and limited capacity to contribute as workforce to the reconstruction process. Also, by being the larger grouping with limited ownership of land and housing, single women, Dalits and indigenous communities were indicated as more likely to face difficulties in accessing and benefiting from housing reconstruction programmes.

In particular, **female-headed households** were found more likely to report feeling unprepared for the forthcoming monsoon season, and less likely to have begun repair or reconstruction of their shelters, although they were often financially better off as they received remittances. In Nepal, the world's second biggest remittance economy, women and elderly are often left alone to look after the children, livestock or crops, while adult men migrate to India or the Middle East to work in construction.

Additionally, **subsistence-based households in rural areas were particularly affected**, as the disaster happened only a few weeks prior to the start of the rice paddy fields planting season.

SHELTER RESPONSE

A. EMERGENCY AND RELIEF SHELTERING

The initial phase aimed to respond to the immediate shelter needs of the population with damaged or destroyed houses, located in the affected locations, in each of the following categories: Hard to Reach, Rural, and Peri-Urban/Urban. Emergency sheltering was seen as a first step to progressively contribute to self-recovery and more durable solutions (appropriate to the needs and context) through the provision of key in-kind shelter items, NFIs and/or cash-transfer programmes. Information, Education and Communication material, training

and follow-up technical assistance were integral components of this phase and were essential to ensure effective and safe use of shelter materials⁴.

An emphasis in this response was the **use of cash payments**. While relief agencies and private sector responders often initially focussed on in-kind distribution, **the government response involved an initial disbursement of unconditional cash**. This was later taken-up more and more by relief agencies, especially as supplementary winterization assistance. Cash was also used as a substitute for in-kind items when the political dispute between Nepal and India resulted in border closures and agencies were unable to obtain fuel for distributions, or to import relief items from India. **Cash allowed affected families to choose** how best they could start the process of recovery, by buying items they needed most. While some families used these funds to pay medical bills or to write off debts, around 80% of the unconditional emergency cash grants made at the beginning of the response were used to purchase shelter-related items.

In the emergency phase, an estimated 700,000 families received emergency assistance, consisting of **cash and/or tarpaulins and non-food items** – more than 90% of the households in need of assistance in the 14 priority districts.

B. SELF-RECOVERY

The overarching objective of this phase was for agencies to **identify response options that supported self-recovery**, to reduce disruption and ensure smooth transition for affected populations to rebuild⁵. The process for selecting response options had to consider recipient choice and the unique set of contextual circumstances and conditions. The products and assistance provided for temporary shelter needed to support

⁴ See case study A.5 as an example of the emergency relief phase of the response.

⁵ See case study A.6 as an example of projects that supported affected people's self-recovery.



People salvaged personal belongings from destroyed houses.

a smooth transition to safe permanent reconstruction. Ideally, assistance should be reusable, re-saleable and transferable, upgradable or extendable. Specific interventions included CGI-sheets and toolkits (or their cash equivalents) and training, such as masonry training and community training around key Build-Back-Safer messages. **In the self-recovery phase, approximately 600,000 families received corrugated iron sheets or the cash equivalent** – again, more than 90% of the households that had been reported as fully damaged.

C. WINTERIZATION

Analysis of the population density above 2,000m, combined with damage data, indicated that there was a “population of concern” of about 200,000 households living above the snow-line in temporary shelter. Consequently, a winterization package – and cash equivalent – was developed, focusing on personal insulation and ensuring a “one warm room” approach, by providing an insulated floor, wind-proofing wall and water-proofing roof⁶. **Approximately 244,158 households living in temporary shelter above 1,500m received winterization assistance.**

CHALLENGES TO THE RESPONSE

Political unrest in southern Nepal broke out in September 2015, following the parliament’s decision to pass a new constitution (foreshadowing wide administrative changes and affecting Indian political influence in Kathmandu). This seriously impeded the humanitarian effort. **A resulting blockade** starting in late September 2015 and lasting six months led to a **critical shortage of fuel and relief supplies**, with queues at gas stations reportedly up to 5km long. In addition, the Nepal Parliament’s failure to ratify a bill introducing the National Reconstruction Authority meant that **there was no overall agency charged with managing earthquake recovery** programmes. Delays in key policy decisions – especially around housing subsidies – further hindered the response.

There were **significant logistical challenges in reaching remote and mountainous areas**, where access to markets is limited. In these areas, organizations supplied relief items in-kind, like tarpaulins, roofing materials, blankets, clothes and kitchen utensils. However, many switched to emergency cash distributions during the fuel crisis.

In certain high altitude districts like Gorkha, the response was particularly strong. These districts obtained greater attention owing to levels of damage, the numbers of NGOs working

⁶ For an example of winterization project, see case study A.7.



Houses were repaired also using the materials provided by humanitarian organizations, such as CGI sheets and timber.

there, as well as extraneous reasons, such as the connections with the British Army Gorkha Regiment. However, lower altitude districts and those stuck by the second earthquake received less assistance. Concerns were raised that **the unevenness of the early humanitarian response** set the course for quicker recovery in some districts than in others.

As in all humanitarian responses, statistics are not always solid and while they can paint broad trends, they may be misleading if taken literally. Relatively high overall statistical percentages of households who received assistance masked the fact that **some districts received more assistance than others, while needs in some areas were actually higher** than the numbers initially estimated. Agencies on the ground continued to report humanitarian needs and gaps, even in the districts that had received the highest amounts of aid.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the overall humanitarian response to the Nepal earthquakes of 2015 was an effective one, with very high coverage, there are a number of lessons to be drawn.

Firstly, cash-based assistance became a preferred modality later in the response⁷ – especially after the border closures – and it became virtually impossible to import or transport relief items in-kind. While cash was better than nothing, it still came with **significant limitations for those living in remote rural areas**, and there was little overall cash coordination or market analysis done by any of the clusters.

Secondly, Nepal has a vibrant private sector. A mapping exercise conducted by the Shelter Cluster showed that – from a handful of organizations surveyed – the private sector had distributed an additional 20% of shelter-related assistance than that already tracked from more traditional humanitarian agencies. **There is a clear need for the humanitarian sector to engage more closely with the private sector** in Nepal.

Thirdly, pre-existing coordination structures and relationships, developed during the preparedness phase, **were crucial in ensuring good links between humanitarian agencies and the government**, and it will be important to further invest in these connections for the future.

The case studies that follow focus on the coordination structure adopted in this response (A.4) and by showing some of the response modalities adopted by humanitarian organizations in the emergency and transitional phases (A.5 to A.7).

⁷ See diagram on page viii, in the introduction.

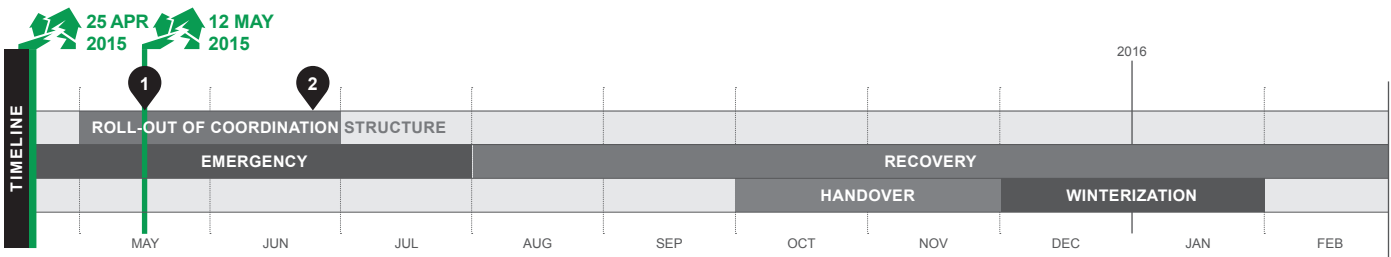
CASE STUDY **NEPAL 2015 / EARTHQUAKE / COORDINATION**

KEYWORDS: Coordination, Emergency shelter, Housing repair, Cash assistance, NFI distribution, Winterization

CRISIS	Nepal Earthquakes, 25 April 2015 and 12 May 2015	
TOTAL HOUSES DAMAGED	604,930 fully damaged 288,856 partially damaged (National Disaster Report 2015).	
TOTAL PEOPLE AFFECTED	886,456 affected families 649,815 displaced Families	
PROJECT LOCATIONS	14 most affected districts: Bhaktapur, Dolakha, Dhading, Gorkha, Kabhrepalanchok, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Makawanpur, Sindhuli, Sindhupalchok, Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap.	
PROJECT OUTPUTS	Coordination provided at national and subnational level (14 districts).	

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Nepal Shelter Cluster Coordination Team organized a system of district-level coordination focal points from operational, cluster partner agencies. These focal points were able to liaise with local authorities, private sector, and implementing partners on issues unique to that geographic area, while communicating and influencing strategic information deriving from policies developed at the national level.



- 1 Mid-May 2015: Cluster coordination set up at national level.
- 2 Late Jun 2015: Subnational coordination set up and operating, with 14 district focal points in place.

- STRENGTHS**
- + Rapid deployment of coordination team (48hr).
 - + Meaningful participation of local civil society and crisis-affected people.
 - + Localized coordination, close to implementing actors and responsive to local needs.
 - + Major impact on the response.

- WEAKNESSES**
- Patchy subnational coordination and uneven distribution of response agencies across districts.
 - Subnational coordination could have been established quicker.
 - Coordination gaps and high turnover of both cluster and government staff.
 - Lack of familiarity about cluster roles and responsibilities amongst some coordinators.
 - Challenges in finding partnerships for local organizations to access resources and funding (especially in urban areas).
 - Delay in the response in some districts, due to the government-led blanket approach.
 - Proliferation of Technical Working Groups, which were sometimes slow to produce outputs and lasted longer than necessary.



The earthquakes caused massive destruction of public buildings and housing.



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In many cases, due to remote locations (hard to reach and at high altitudes), winterization kits were dispatched by air. However, helicopters were expensive and had limited carrying capacities, adding to the challenges faced by organizations in timely assisting affected populations.

THE ROLE OF THE SHELTER CLUSTER IN NEPAL

See overview A.3 for more on the situation pre and post the 2015 earthquakes, and the shelter response.

The Shelter Cluster is a global coordination platform endorsed by the UN General Assembly that works with governments to manage shelter and housing response following disasters. It had existed before in Nepal, having been convened following the 2008 Koshi Floods in the South of Nepal. Key relationships with the government as well as preparedness activities for managing humanitarian response at the national level had been developed since then.

In response to a request for international assistance by the Government of Nepal, the Shelter Cluster was convened in the immediate aftermath of the first earthquake, in April 2015. Its three core roles were: 1) identification of appropriate technical guidance for emergency and early recovery response in the shelter/housing sector; 2) identification of humanitarian needs, gaps and priority communities or areas for assistance; 3) strategy development to guide and inform an effective response. Over 300 organizations worked together to support the timely and effective delivery of humanitarian shelter assistance, including NGOs, INGOs, Civil Society Organizations, UN Agencies, Government Departments, Private Sector, Donors and Diplomatic Missions.

In the context of a political transition, which preoccupied national government decision-making, the challenging geographical conditions across the Himalayas and the growing importance of engaging local actors, the Shelter Cluster adopted an extensive subnational coordination system, at the district level. This case study focuses on what this meant in practice and some of the successes and challenges of localizing coordination in a major natural disaster.

NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY

Following the two earthquakes, the government identified 14 priority districts for response, where 80% of the national damage occurred. For this reason, Cluster partners were encouraged to target shelter efforts within these priority districts,

which were coordinated via four hubs.

Given the timing of the earthquakes shortly before the start of the monsoon season, the Cluster advocated for the prioritization of response in hard-to-reach areas, which would likely be cut off due to roads and trails conditions, as well as the increased risk of landslides.

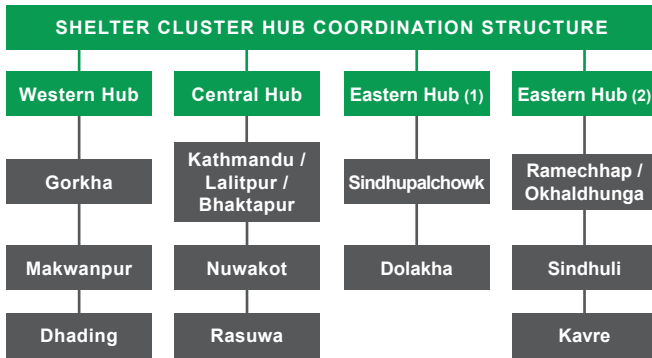
COORDINATION STRUCTURE

The aim of the Nepal Shelter Cluster was to **decentralize the coordination role to the local level**, to ensure that coordination services were more responsive to local needs and local emergency / recovery challenges could be quickly identified and raised at national level. A combination of national NGOs and international agencies took on district coordination roles, with one agency leading each district. These agencies were, in turn, supported by four full-time Hub Coordinators, from a range of international partners with experience in coordinating natural disasters, who oversaw three districts each. This ensured that there was consistent coordination support – focusing on technical standards, needs and gaps, and response prioritization – that immediately addressed local needs. The decentralized coordination system also ensured closer relationships with the implementing arms of the local government, which had a significant role in the response.

District level coordination was also extremely important, owing to multiple layers of government agencies involved in managing the response (the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction, Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Home Affairs were highly influential).

The localization of coordination developed out of emerging practice and lessons learned from past responses (especially the Haiti earthquake, Pakistan floods, South Sudan conflict, and the Philippines Typhoon Haiyan response¹). In part, the roles of District and Hub Coordinators also arose from the needs to **provide effective coordination across a very wide and geographically challenging area** in the Himalayas.

¹ See A.4 in SP2010, A.22 in SP2010, A.23 in this edition and A.23 in SP2013-2014 respectively.



The Shelter Cluster in Nepal had four hubs to coordinate the activities in the 14 affected districts.

A criticism of past responses has been that coordination can be excessively focused at the national level, where politics, relationships and concerns can be a long way from specific local needs². In line with a key change in development and humanitarian thinking, the Cluster sought to **reinforce and promote the role of local actors and civil society organizations (CSOs)** in the management of the shelter response, by allocating key districts coordination roles to them. NGOs and CSOs were formal members, or actively involved in, the Cluster’s decision-making structure at district, hub and national level.

At the national level, the government requested a split between the Coordination Support Group (CSG) and the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG). The former had previously met and included representatives from government, donors, UN agencies, NGOs and INGOs. This was intended to be a representative sample of the Shelter Cluster, to provide strategic direction and oversight of the response. In practice, government partners preferred the SAG to consist of the senior Nepali-speaking representatives from key agencies, with whom they had a longer-term relationship. **The decision to have a separate CSG more focused on operations** occurred six weeks into the response, after multiple earlier meetings of the bigger group, and was intended to make discussions and decision-making more streamlined. Meetings of the CSG were conducted in English (although continued to involve NGOs and CSOs) and recommendations were passed up to the SAG for endorsement.

² For challenges of this kind, see overview A.39, about the Ecuador 2016 earthquake response.



National Coordination Architecture, showing the membership of decision-making groups.

INVOLVEMENT OF AFFECTED PEOPLE

Response coordinators were closer to crisis-affected populations and each district took on the complexion of the local response community. As most organizations in some districts were local, or “local international”, meetings were held in Nepali, encouraging the ownership and participation of local actors. Additionally, in predominantly urban districts in the Kathmandu Valley, IDP representative groups and CSOs were key players in district-level clusters. Urban IDP representative groups also participated in the Cluster’s coordination work as formal district coordinators and through membership in the SAG. Crisis-affected people consequently played a direct coordination role at both the local and national levels.

MAJOR COORDINATION ASPECTS

The Cluster at both national and district level focused mainly on the following³:

- Development of standard, cluster-wide, packages for emergency response and recovery (both in-kind and their cash equivalents);
- Advocacy around winter preparedness, including mapping and identification of priority intervention areas, and a winterization package;
- Analysis of gender and protection issues relating to shelter in Nepal, including the development of beneficiary selection criteria, to target the most vulnerable individuals and households. While this was officially endorsed at national level, local governments at district level often preferred blanket approaches to distribution. A major role of hub and district coordinators was to reach an agreement with local governments around the implementation of the response strategy, without compromising humanitarian values;
- Fundraising and advocacy through the UN Appeals process, as well as directly with donors and diplomatic missions;
- Inter-sectoral coordination supporting links between shelter, WASH, livelihoods, protection, as well as the cash working group. Logistics was an immensely important component, as a political crisis between Nepal and India resulted in border closures and ongoing fuel shortages. Finding the best use of common logistics assets became increasingly important as the response progressed.
- Establishment, support and funding of the Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform (HRRP), to take on the longer-term recovery coordination role.

EXIT AND HANDOVER

Discussions started early on about the appropriate duration of the Shelter Cluster in Nepal. By June 2015, it was agreed by cluster partners, government, SAG and CSG that a separate body would be established to take on coordination and technical guidance needs, focusing on longer-term recovery. In order to support this process, a Recovery Working Group was established (under the Cluster), co-led by the two agencies that would take on the role of longer-term recovery coordination, once the Cluster phased out. The Shelter Cluster was replaced by the HRRP and resources were made available to the two co-lead agencies. The Cluster itself wound down on 31 December 2015, after nine months leading the response, and continued in a much reduced form, focusing on preparedness activities.

³ More information and several documents are available on the Nepal 2015 Earthquake page of the Shelter Cluster website: <http://bit.ly/1GuSykV>

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS OF THIS APPROACH

The Nepal Cluster provided a **model for the localization of coordination and set a precedent for participatory and collaborative leadership** among cluster members. When it worked well, **district and hub-level coordinators supported each other and provided an immediate forum** to address needs and gaps, support local government, and provide technical advice to agencies and beneficiary groups in the field. Additionally, more than 20 different organizations took on a formal coordination roles at the local level, meaning that the **strength of the cluster was reinforced through participation and ownership at all levels**. Strong local coordination services also meant that the national level cluster was in a more powerful position to address needs and advocate at a policy-level through **constant information flow and feedback**. While the national level was more responsive to the politics of managing a humanitarian response, **coordination at hub and district levels was able to address specific needs** of implementing partners and work closely with local government and local civil society groups.

This experience **reinforced the importance of coordination**, especially for large emergencies. While many agencies based themselves out of higher-profile districts, others were responsive to Cluster calls to **spread the response more evenly** and donors underpinned the Cluster strategy. This sought to target areas that were under-served and adopted a “winter race” approach of targeting higher altitudes and remote locations that would be vulnerable and inaccessible during the coming winter. Additionally, the Cluster developed **common technical standards** to ensure measurable impact and consistent implementation across the many agencies delivering humanitarian assistance.

The Cluster was able to ensure **key partners** – the government, the Humanitarian Coordinator and major donors – **were provided with a reliable overview of the situation and challenges** and were able to provide resources, influence, policy direction and high-level advocacy, based on this information.

LEARNINGS

- Reinforced the importance and effectiveness of **inclusive, collaborative cluster leadership** in which agencies have clear opportunities to engage meaningfully in decision-making. **The cluster functions through the legitimacy and influence of establishing consensus**, so when agencies were able to participate and take on significant coordination roles, this became easier. Participation also helped with the identification and adherence to appropriate technical packages of assistance, the development of a common strategy, government endorsement, and donor support.
- The need to **provide support and training on the job for agencies and individuals** new to the role.
- **Engagement of donors is crucial** at both the strategic level, as well as in developing cluster coordination structures. Donor involvement in decision-making meant support for localization and additional resources to make this happen.
- Importance of **increased engagement with local government**. Local coordination ensured a more effective response.
- A major innovation and opportunity was the **participation of crisis-affected people and local civil society organizations** in the coordination role itself. This was primarily an urban phenomenon (Kathmandu Valley). As the response focused on supporting rural recovery, there were **insufficient resources to build on urban participation beyond the immediate emergency period**. Providing a greater platform for participation in this case did not necessarily result in greater access to resources. **Mutually beneficial partnerships with better-resourced organizations should be a priority** for local civil society in future responses.
- At the subnational level, the full cluster set-up was difficult, but partner agencies filled the gap wherever possible and, in some districts, coordinators rotated. As a preparedness effort, it is useful to **identify agencies operating in major districts with a longer-term presence as cluster focal points**. This can be advocated through the government lead agency.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

The main challenges were around **consistency and availability of coordination staff at the local level**. While there were many devoted and talented coordinators, during the overall lifespan of the cluster there were gaps when positions went unfilled, especially in the first months. Further, district focal points were working mainly on their own organizations programmes, meaning that the **coordination role sometimes took a distant second place in work priorities**. Finally, many coordinators who volunteered were **new to the cluster and so greater support and familiarization was required** from the national cluster.

Initially, coordination was most effective where there were also inter-sectoral platforms, with offices to support such coordination efforts. However, these were only established in two locations and ended by late September 2015.

Ensuring an evenly spread coordination structure **did not necessarily ensure an evenly spread response**. Relief agencies flocked to high-damage, high-profile districts (especially Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk, which had been badly hit during the April earthquake). For much of the response, the media continued to refer to the event as the “Gorkha earthquake”. Once settled, relatively few agencies moved operations, despite ongoing advocacy from the cluster that these two districts had been well-served, while significant gaps remained elsewhere. **Almost no agencies worked in the highly urbanised Kathmandu Valley**, despite the finding of the Post Disaster Needs Assessment that 25% of damage was in urban areas. Finally, **while an international emergency was declared for 14 districts, 23 districts were affected in total**.

The Cluster addressed some of the challenges by holding frequent “retreats” where all members of the coordination team were brought together to share experiences, challenges, resources and to train local coordinators. The appointment of full-time, devoted, hub coordinators (each with 3 or 4 districts to support) meant that there was additional support for over-worked district coordinators and guidance for those who were new. Donors were encouraged to fund agencies for coordination roles, and embraced the idea in key districts.

CASE STUDY

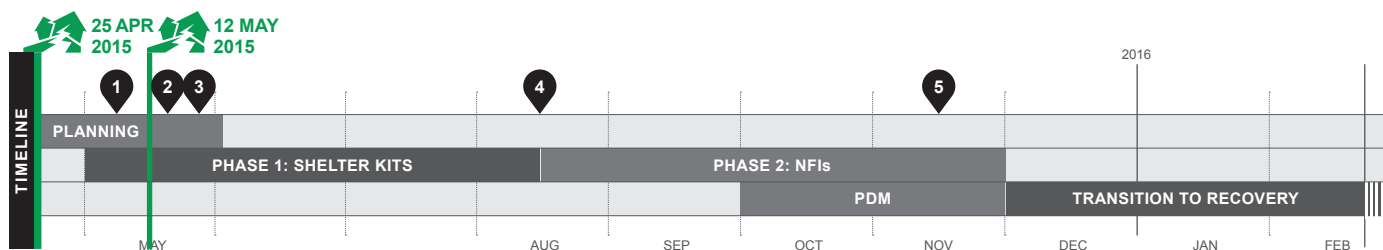
NEPAL 2015 / EARTHQUAKE

KEYWORDS: Emergency shelter, Transitional shelter, NFI distribution, Training, Gender mainstreaming, GBV risk mitigation, Disaster Risk Reduction, Community participation

CRISIS	Nepal Earthquakes, 25 April 2015 and 12 May 2015	
TOTAL HOUSES DAMAGED	604,930 fully damaged 288,856 partially damaged (National Disaster Report 2015).	
TOTAL PEOPLE AFFECTED	886,456 affected families 649,815 displaced Families.	
PROJECT LOCATIONS	Sindhupalchok, Dhading, Gorkha, Lamjung districts.	
BENEFICIARIES	20,000 households (100,000 people).	
PROJECT OUTPUTS	Shelter, WASH and Livelihoods support to 20,000 households.	
SHELTER SIZE	Min. 20m² of covered area by using the two bundles of 9' CGI sheets as roofing.	
SHELTER DENSITY	Min 3.5m².	
MATERIALS COST	USD 150 per household (including labour, in line with Shelter Cluster recommendations).	
PROJECT COST	USD 200	

PROJECT SUMMARY

The project provided emergency shelter supplies to help earthquake-affected households establish temporary shelters, and/or make urgent repairs to their house, with high-quality and durable materials, before the beginning of the monsoon season. The coordination of shelter and WASH relief distributions, and the integration of a gender sensitive approach to the emergency response, enabled a comprehensive and context sensitive delivery of essential household NFIs, integrated to address challenges for women and girls.



- 1 8 May 2015: Rapid Gender Analysis report issued.
- 2 16 May - 3 Jun 2015: Inter-agency shelter and settlements vulnerability assessment.
- 3 22 May - 10 Jun 2015: Post Disaster Needs Assessment led by the National Planning Commission.
- 4 Aug 2015: Emergency shelter kit distributions completed.
- 5 Nov 2015: NFI distributions and Post Distribution Monitoring completed.

STRENGTHS

- + Rapid Gender Analysis, carried out at the onset of the emergency.
- + Local partners effectively mobilized the community and sensitized on GBV mitigation.
- + The shelter package provided choice to the beneficiaries.
- + Linkage between shelter, WASH and gender.
- + Priority lines and transport support at distribution points.
- + Complaints mechanism and community-based approach.

WEAKNESSES

- Delays in the logistics pipelines meant that some areas were reached too late.
- Staffing shortages, due to poor monitoring process combined with extreme weather conditions.
- Low shelter- and disaster-response capacity of local partners.
- Poor coordination with local authorities led to exclusion of vulnerable people who were not recognized as households.



Many constructions affected by the earthquake were masonry buildings. The project provided materials to make urgent repairs to damaged homes, or build temporary shelters.

SITUATION AFTER THE DISASTER

See overview A.3 for more background information.

RAPID GENDER ANALYSIS

A Rapid Gender Analysis was carried out, in the aftermath of the earthquake, to provide an overview of the gender relations in Nepal before the event and how the crisis had affected those dynamics. The background secondary information was integrated with primary data, which was gathered by the field assessment team through key informant interviews and separate focus group discussions. These were led by male and female staff, and helped develop initial recommendations for gender-sensitive responses for all sectors. The team conducted the assessment in communities that were residing in some of the areas where the local partner was established prior to the earthquake, in order to better compare pre- and post-disaster information on gender roles and cultural norms. **The feedback received by the different community groups led to significant improvements in terms of safety and appropriateness of project designs**, as well as including protection and gender mainstreaming for the implementation of distribution activities and post distribution monitoring.

Gender considerations:

Due to the extensive labour migration, there was a high percentage of female-headed households in the affected region (25.7%). Additionally, the practice of isolating menstruating or post-partum women for 5-6 days per month is still common in the far- and mid-Western regions of Nepal. This was an additional psychological stress for women and girls, having to also face the impact of the earthquake and the lack of adequate hygiene and sanitary items.

Almost half of the population gets married between the ages of 14-19 and girls leave home to live with in-laws after marriage. In some areas, marriage occurs as early as age 10. Considering the practice of early marriage, shelter programmes had to be aware of the number of child-headed households in the affected communities.

Widows often face exclusion and persecution, as they are blamed for their husband's deaths, ostracized and seen as a burden on their family – particularly in rural areas. With the high death toll caused by the earthquake, their vulnerability had increased.

MAIN PROJECT COMPONENTS

- **Capacity-building**, through training local partner staff on shelter, emergency distributions, gender and gender-based violence (GBV) awareness and referral;
- **Shelter and household NFI distributions**, based on a government-led blanket approach for the first distribution, but prioritizing the most vulnerable groups and then providing them **additional support in the second phase of distributions** (households with a completely destroyed house, female-headed and elderly-headed households, people living with disabilities, socially and economically poor families);
- **Key messaging and community awareness raising** to promote more resilient shelter, GBV risk mitigation and prevention, and protection (including Housing, Land and Property rights).



The rapid gender analysis, conducted at the outset of the emergency, highlighted gender-related norms and inequalities that were considered during project design.

TARGET AREAS AND BENEFICIARY SELECTION

The project targeted four of the most affected districts prioritized by the government. The organization signed agreements with the government to be able to respond to the emergency, and with the District Disaster Response Committee upon agreement of target groups and locations. Through meeting with the appointed disaster coordination officials, the shelter and local partner staff collaborated with the local authorities to obtain the existing beneficiaries lists and prioritize the most affected areas and, among those, the most vulnerable groups and individuals. These lists were then verified through community mobilizers.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project was implemented by shelter technical teams and the local partner’s technical team and social mobilizers, supported by one logistics officer, one distribution officer and a GBV and protection officer.

In order to ensure safety and security, accessibility and appropriateness of distribution activities, the field teams coordinated with district authorities, village leaders and community volunteers, to establish the following at each distribution point:

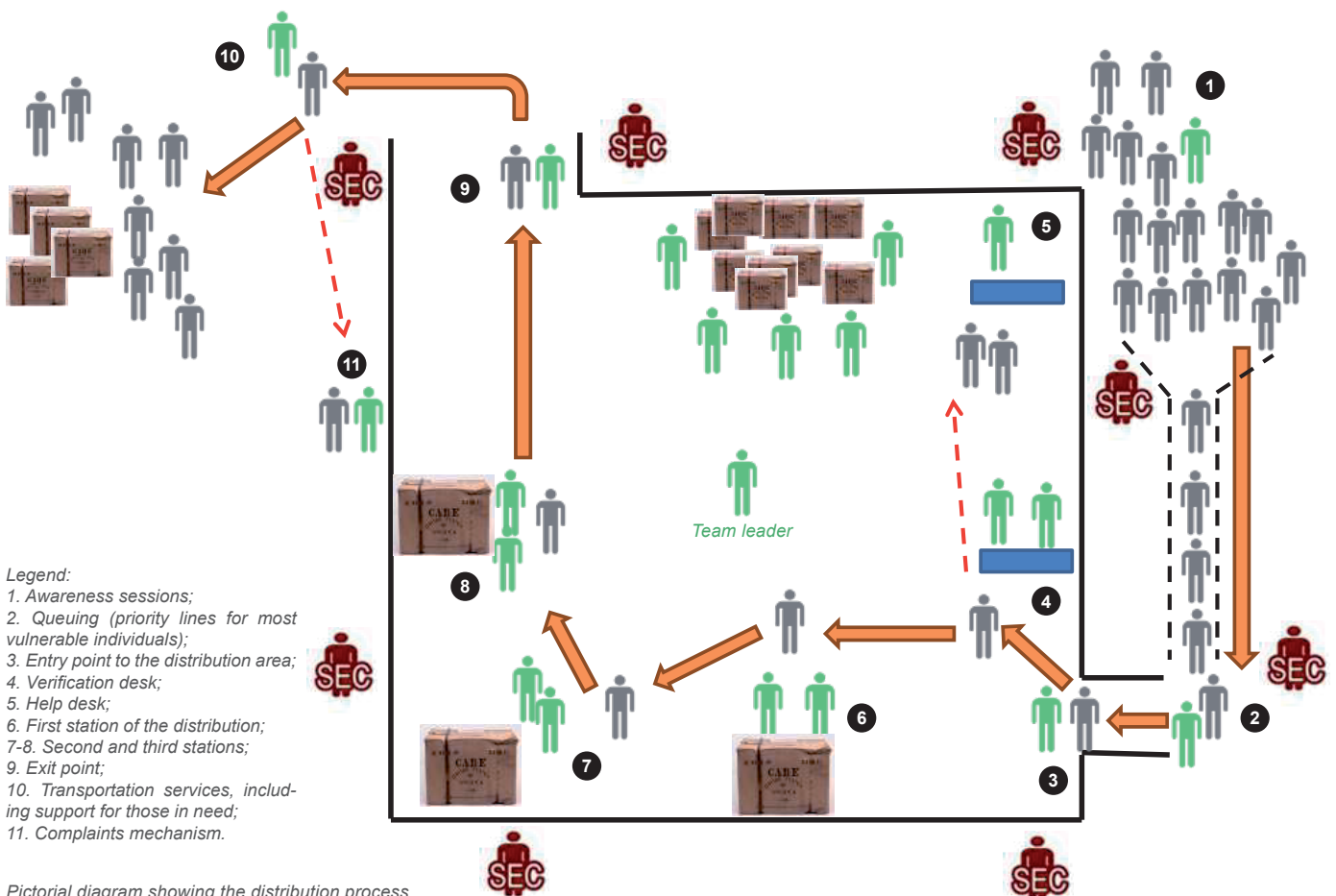
- **Access for vehicles**, for transportation of goods (close to large roads, but not on the road, so as not to interfere with traffic or pedestrians);
- **Site enclosure**, with different designated areas, so as to facilitate crowd control and create space for arriving beneficiaries;

- **Access to basic facilities** (water and sanitation facilities, covered area, first aid, etc.);
- **Proximity to the village** to reduce the travel time for the beneficiaries;
- **Distance from unsafe locations** for women and girls (e.g. hidden and narrow forest paths).

Female staff members in particular mentioned that female-headed households would have little time left after their domestic chores and child care to reach the distribution points, and other groups would not be able to wait for a long time in line. **A priority line was therefore set up** for the elderly, pregnant and lactating women and people with disabilities, to reduce waiting times and avoid any potential tensions or violence while waiting.

People with limited mobility or capacity to carry weights were provided with **extra support to carry the items home** from the distribution point. This was done either by providing wheel barrows to be shared among groups of households, by employing paid porters, or through help from village volunteers.

Distribution sites were set up in such a way to **maximize crowd control**, for example by organizing distributions at different time intervals, to avoid long waiting times; or by controlling the flow of people through different steps of the process.





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Affected people were engaged throughout the programme. The information gathered from rapid needs assessments and the “gender in brief” report¹ enabled the inclusion of the most culturally appropriate items in the relief kits (NFIs and dignity kits in particular). **The community leaders were consulted** to verify the lists of beneficiaries received for each village from the government authorities, and any cases of beneficiaries being left out were identified and addressed (e.g. split households, extended households, numerous families, etc.). **This included a number of single women or female-headed households**, who were not recognized as separate from the former husband’s family and were therefore cut out from the assistance.

Pre-distribution sessions were held, to register beneficiaries and provide orientation on the materials to be distributed and their appropriate use, as well as to assess security and accessibility issues for the distribution site and its surroundings. Due to the large-scale landslides occurring as a consequence of the heavy monsoon rains, major transport routes were affected, making it often impossible to reach the affected villages. In those cases, the beneficiary households were consulted in focus group discussions, directly through the volunteers working with the local partner organization and living in the villages. The results were then relayed back to the sub-office.

Complaints mechanisms were put in place, including a hotline, complaints boxes, and an assistance desk, during and after distributions, to allow beneficiaries to voice their concerns individually and confidentially. **Post-distribution monitoring** was also carried out, through door-to-door surveys and gender-segregated group discussions.

MAIN CHALLENGES

The geography of the affected areas and the imminent rainy season posed a complex challenge to the project. Due to the remoteness of most of the affected areas and the unpredictability of weather conditions, the emergency team focused on identifying the most suitable locations and times for the distributions, according to beneficiaries’ availability, in relation to livelihood practices and especially for women and girls; assessing transportation needs and accessibility routes; and whether it was relevant to set up a forward warehouse (in the higher areas) or storage in the affected villages.

National and local agreements on the contents and targeting of shelter emergency distributions also caused problems. For example, lower-quality CGI sheets were easier for people to transport, as they could be rolled, although it meant that they would not meet the standards set by the Shelter Cluster at national level. **Transport challenges** were especially relevant to women and girls, who were often sent to the distribution points

¹ Available at <http://bit.ly/2iftT0c>.



After the rapid gender analysis, the project consulted the communities, engaged women in construction activities, and aimed to meet specific gender needs in both distributions and construction (here, on a building site in Barpak).

to collect the relief items, which were heavy and cumbersome. The size of separate distribution packages were thus organized to be easier to transport, and female staff (trained in gender in emergencies) were present at all distributions.

The Nepali communities and local authorities were concerned that all distributions should be blanket coverage – in contradiction to the approach of many INGOs to support the most vulnerable. Humanitarian agencies agreed that first distributions would follow an equitable approach, while secondary distributions would focus on alleviating the risks for the most vulnerable, through a more targeted and equality-driven approach. Despite this blanket approach **however, existing social norms concerning women, caste, and age based inequalities still made certain groups invisible or excluded** from the recovery and reconstruction activities. There was evidence that single women (unmarried, separated or widowed) were not recognized by the village committees as eligible to receive the Earthquake Victim Card, and therefore were excluded from relief cash grants and items distributions. This created tensions between extended households and, to some extent, exposed women to GBV from male members of the extended family. The organization mediated with the district authorities for the integration of the women who had been overlooked, so that they could receive the relief items.

WIDER IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

The organization developed a **construction training component and awareness raising sessions** for both women and men, in an effort to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. This was integrated into the longer-term recovery strategy, so as to enable the largest number of female-headed households to be involved in building and construction supervision activities, during the owner-driven reconstruction process initiated by the government.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

+ **The Rapid Gender Analysis** – carried out at the onset of the emergency – helped understanding gender relations and traditional practices that make women and girls subjects of discrimination. This was used to take account of **gender sensitive considerations and include a GBV mitigation strategy** in relief distributions.

+ The local NGO partners effectively **mobilized information volunteers in each village**, for better community mobilization and **GBV mitigation, prevention and sensitization**, as well as providing support in implementation and monitoring of relief distributions in remote locations. Gender and GBV trainings were delivered to the organization's technical staff, the local partner staff and the community volunteers.

+ **The standard shelter package provided a choice for households** to rebuild according to their needs and capacities, and did not impose a single shelter design or option. Most of the households combined salvaged and new materials to build larger or multiple shelters.

+ WASH and shelter distributions were coordinated, enabling more efficient monitoring and community mobilization activities for the local partner. **The linkage between shelter, WASH and gender interventions** enabled the distribution of combined emergency kits, comprising both shelter-related NFIs and hygiene/dignity kits, including items particularly needed by women and girls.

+ **The most vulnerable groups had a priority line and a "safe passage"** at distributions, and those with limited mobility, or feeling more vulnerable for carrying valuable items, were assisted to do so.

+ **The complaints mechanisms** (suggestion boxes and a complaints mobile number to receive calls and texts) and the **community-based approach** helped address inequalities in the assistance, by allowing beneficiaries to individually voice concerns and provide feedback directly to field teams.

WEAKNESSES

- The switch from tarpaulin to CGI distributions caused **delays in the logistics pipelines**, due to limited local supplies and increased taxes on importation. As a result, **some areas were**

reached too late to meet the immediate shelter needs. This led to a large number of households to build their emergency shelter with salvaged materials, and then use the additional shelter materials for secondary purposes (e.g. cattle sheds, food/grain storages).

- **The construction monitoring process was not as robust** as it could have been, due to the remoteness of the assisted areas, contributing to shelter staffing shortage at any given time, as staff was so dispersed. Due to the monsoon season and subsequent landslides and road blockages, **technical staff were unable to visit project areas** as often as planned, to assess whether shelter materials were used properly.

- **The local partners** had a very good knowledge of the communities, the culture and the needs of the population, but most of them **had low capacity in terms of shelter programming** and little or no experience of major disaster responses. Shelter training and capacity-building at the beginning of the project would have been beneficial.

- **Poor coordination with village leaders and district authorities** to identify gaps and duplication in the provision of assistance. Despite best efforts, **some vulnerable people were excluded** from distributions.

Materials in the Shelter kit	Qty	Cost (USD)
Corrugated Galvanized Iron (CGI) sheets , bundle of 9 sheets	2	118
Shelter toolkit 1 x Handsaw, for timber, 550mm, wooden handle 0.5kg roofing nails, galvanized with rubber washer, umbrella type 1 x Shovel, round point with Y handle 1 x Hoe, with long handle, large type 1 x Machete, wooden handle 1 x Shears, straight, for metal sheet, semi-hard, 250mm	1	24
Shelter fixing kit 1 pair of gloves, 1x 25m aluminium wire 0,5 kg timber nails, 75mm 0,5 kg timber nails, 40mm 1x Tie Wire, galvanized, diam. 1.5mm, 25m, roll 1 x Rope, polypropylene, black, 12mm diam., twisted, bundle 30m	1	8
Materials in the NFI kit		
Kitchen set	1	38
Mattress (synthetic chatai) size 4x6 feet	2	4
Woollen Blanket , woven, 65% wool, 1.5x2.25m, 2kg	5	8

LEARNINGS

- **The Rapid Gender Analysis could have been more regularly updated** and supplemented with information from field assessments, focus group discussions and key informant interviews, to better capture the rapidly changing context.
- **A stronger collaboration with the local authorities on beneficiary cross check and prioritization** of vulnerable groups would have ensured a more efficient registration and distribution process for the most vulnerable cases, in particular **to avoid minority groups (certain castes, single women and the elderly) being side lined**. This was taken into account and addressed during the following recovery and reconstruction process.
- Information on the **specific shelter needs and preferences of women and girls**, in terms of safety and privacy, should have been incorporated into the recommendations of the rapid gender analysis. This would have better informed the emergency shelter distributions and key messaging, including tips on safe space arrangements (e.g. partitioning, lighting) for acceptable privacy, safety and security of all household members.
- **Community consultations during needs assessment are key to receive primary information on the specific needs** of the affected households, and make sure that all groups (including marginalized individuals, women and girls) have the possibility to raise their concerns and preferences over the design of shelters.

CASE STUDY

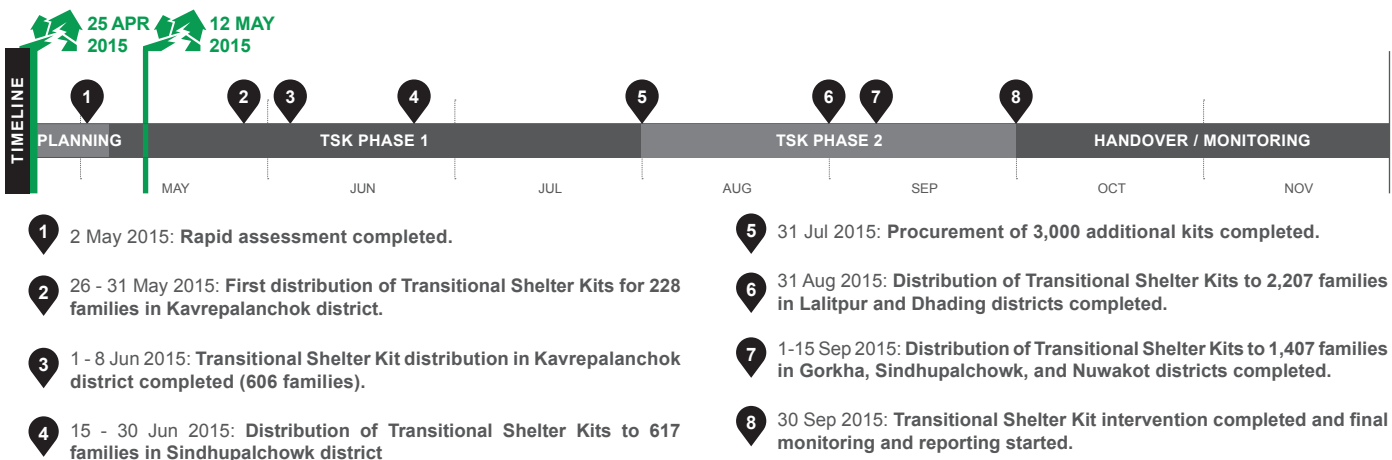
NEPAL 2015 / EARTHQUAKE

KEYWORDS: Transitional shelter, Distribution, Community participation, Coordination, Training, Disaster Risk Reduction

CRISIS	Nepal Earthquakes, 25 April 2015 and 12 May 2015	
TOTAL HOUSES DAMAGED	604,930 fully damaged 288,856 partially damaged (National Disaster Report 2015).	
TOTAL PEOPLE AFFECTED	886,456 affected families 649,815 displaced families	
PROJECT LOCATIONS	Sindhupalchok, Gorkha, Dhading, Lalitpur, Nuwakot, Kabhrepalanchok districts.	
BENEFICIARIES	5,065 households, including 350 people with disabilities, 1,000 single female-headed households and 100 single elderly individuals.	
PROJECT OUTPUTS	5,065 Transitional Shelter Kits distributed.	
SHELTER SIZE	16.7m² (according to sample design).	
SHELTER DENSITY	3.4m² per person (based on average household size of 4.88, from 2011 census).	
MATERIALS COST	Approx. USD 200 per household (NPR 21,484), including labour, and transport.	
PROJECT COST	USD 250 per household (estimated).	
OUTCOME INDICATOR	93% of households used the kits to build temporary shelters within the first month of distribution.	

PROJECT SUMMARY

The project targeted more than 5,000 families – whose houses had been damaged or destroyed – with the distribution of transitional shelter kits to make basic repairs, or build a temporary shelter. Training was provided to demonstrate the design of a suitable shelter that could be constructed with the supplied materials. In so doing, the project aimed at facilitating the early start of people’s self-recovery.



STRENGTHS

- + High community participation.
- + Rapid project implementation and at scale.
- + The coordination with local government and like-minded organizations leveraged resources.
- + Production and distribution of instruction manuals on various options for temporary shelters.

WEAKNESSES

- The earthquake directly affected the organizations’ local staff.
- Lack of clearly defined internal procurement procedures.
- Medium-term disaster response staff shortages.
- The assistance provided focused too heavily on a set design.

SITUATION AFTER THE DISASTER

See overview A.3 for more information on the background and the national shelter response.

After the earthquake, many families were sleeping in open areas without adequate cover, suffering cold night-time conditions and rain. The monsoon season (mid-June to early September) further exacerbated the existing shelter situation for thousands of families whose homes were damaged or destroyed. The monsoon arrived a few weeks after the second earthquake and people had to rely on emergency shelters, built with salvaged materials, plastics and tarpaulins, to withstand the heavy rains. Apart from shelter, people also needed a place to store their materials, crops, agricultural products and cattle. The need for early recovery solutions – that could protect families and assets – was high.

ASSESSMENTS AND PRE-DISTRIBUTION PLANNING

The organization deployed its experienced disaster response personnel to Nepal within 48 hours of the disaster, to support the Nepal office in resuming office functions, as well as initiating disaster response activities. **Rapid assessments were conducted** in collaboration with the Shelter Cluster and governmental agencies (at national and local levels), to determine the appropriate shelter interventions and identify areas most in need of support.

For the distribution of the Transitional Shelter Kits, the project targeted six of Nepal's most severely affected districts. The beneficiary selection process focused on **both a blanket approach for entire communities** devastated by the earthquake (85% households affected), **as well as targeting of specific vulnerabilities**, using the following criteria: disability, single female-headed families, those who suffered casualties during the earthquake and low-income families. Kits were also distributed through the Nepal Blind Association and the National Handicapped Association, in various earthquake affected districts.

Beneficiary selection was completed in consultation with local government officials, and lists were verified by community leaders and local partners on the ground. Staff conducted field visits, direct observations and interviews to avoid duplication.

Simultaneously, the organization did internal planning and preparations for budgeting, procurement, warehousing, transportation, other logistics preparedness and detailed distribution planning. **In the early stages of the response, regional and global experts were brought in** to guide the technical specifications of the kit. Several similarities emerged with the response to the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, prompting to adopt a similar shelter design. The Pakistani response was similar in context, with the mountainous area, supply chain challenges, and frigid winter temperatures. The design was adjusted to incorporate locally available materials.

DISTRIBUTION PHASE

The organization mobilized five staff (one international and four nationals) and eight trained volunteers, to distribute the kits, as well as to provide orientation and training to the community, on how to use these items to prepare temporary shelters using a Build Back Safer approach, **suggesting to use a recommended semi-circular design or the beneficiary's own preferred one**. Based on need, other staff was chosen to support functions such as procurement, warehousing, transportation, communications and post-distribution monitoring.



Some people used the materials provided to build temporary shelters according to the organization's design.

Volunteers from local communities were actively involved in beneficiary registration, distribution and transportation of the materials at the household level, assisting families who could not transport the materials. **The project was implemented with local partners**, enabling a higher number of vulnerable families to be served, in a shorter period.

EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The relationships developed in almost two decades operating in the country were a fundamental strength in mobilizing resources after the disaster. For example, **pre-established women's groups** supported distributions, whilst engineering students (engaged before the disaster) became key informants to develop culturally appropriate shelter solutions.

Community participation was encouraged throughout the project cycle, with beneficiaries being active in identification, selection and verification processes, communication channels related to distribution information, crowd management during distributions, trainings on shelter set-up, transport of the kits from distribution sites, as well as post-distribution monitoring and feedback. More than 1,000 community volunteers were mobilized, significantly supporting an increase in social ties and motivation for self-recovery.

POST-DISTRIBUTION MONITORING

An independent team (seven trained M&E staff and volunteers) **was deployed to conduct Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM)**, to determine how the distributed shelter materials were used, their relevance and effectiveness. Within weeks of the first distributions, the PDM team carried out field visits to eight different distribution areas and interviewed more than 329 households using a mobile app.

The results showed that **93% of households used the materials for constructing temporary shelters, within the first month of the distribution**. Among them, **63% followed their own design**, normally including the use of salvaged materials, whilst 30% used the design suggested by the organization. For non-displaced populations, transitional shelters provided a basic starter home, to be upgraded, expanded to permanent shelters or replaced, over time and as resources allowed. Finally, only 7% did not construct any shelters within a few weeks, as they had other key priorities, including food, livelihoods and agriculture, as the project started during the harvesting season (June-July). In addition, some female-headed households were waiting for additional help from their relatives and local volunteers, in order to construct the shelter.



Although a set design was provided by the organization, many people adopted their own designs, using the materials provided with the kits, along with salvaged materials, to meet their own specific needs.

The PDM team also set up a **beneficiary communication and feedback mechanism**, and the organization established a **quality-assurance monitoring system**, to support real-time adjustments of the materials being procured. This process was managed by senior disaster-response staff and logistics personnel, through random inspections. An additional level of oversight was obtained through field visits and community meetings, which were facilitated by senior staff. The organization likewise supported the **monitoring of all local partners** involved in the distribution.

MATERIALS SUPPLY AND LOGISTICS

All materials were procured nationally, following competitive bidding processes. The first lots of items were delivered within the stipulated timeframe, allowing the distribution to start within the fourth week after the disaster. **This local procurement was efficient, contributed to the local economy and kept the costs low**, while adhering to quality criteria as per Cluster specifications. However, the procurement of the second lot of CGI sheets took longer than expected, as the demand increased drastically two months after the disaster. Considering the distribution plan, **the logistics and procurement staff decided to temporarily warehouse all the kits at central locations** in Kathmandu, then dispatch them to distribution points in targeted districts, following recommendations by the distribution team. The staging and distribution points were decided in consultation with representatives of affected communities and local authorities, who carried out **logistical surveys of targeted distribution points**. However, there were not enough suppliers that could provide the required specifications and stocks. **Consultations were carried out** with likeminded organizations and experienced team members from the regional office, regarding market surveys and different procurement processes.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND DRR

The organization provided two main types of technical support. Firstly, by **disseminating Disaster Risk Reduction and Build Back Safer key messages** during pre-distribution orientations. Secondly, by providing **direct technical construction support**. Local engineers were trained on how to construct the temporary shelter units according to the design, and took on a training role during the installation of the kits. This methodology included building a demonstration unit prior to distribution. The beneficiaries were also informed about the different design options that could be utilized, and a low-literacy instructional guide was distributed during the demonstration.

The communities were also encouraged to listen to government's radio and other public service announcements, that broadcasted the 10 key messages developed by the Shelter Cluster.

MAIN CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

GEOGRAPHIC AND WEATHER CHALLENGES

During the monsoon season, several landslides occurred due to the cracks made by the earthquakes. Further, floods in the seasonal and perennial rivers, due to the heavy rains, made roads impassable. In view of this, the organization mobilized highly trained and committed staff to the distribution sites and extra precautionary measures were taken for safety and logistics within each local context. The teams stayed in the remote villages for the duration of the distributions.

LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

In certain distribution sites, damaged electricity and mobile networks created challenges in communication. As such, the team had to carry additional equipment and communication tools, including power banks for charging mobile phones. The organization also coordinated with local authorities and partners, to ensure emergency communications.

During implementation, there were protests and strikes due to disagreements on the newly issued constitution. This hampered distribution planning, as in certain areas there were road blockages. The organization had to proactively coordinate with all stakeholders, including government and communities, to overcome this challenge.

CONTINUOUS AFTERSHOCKS

Strong aftershocks were felt for a long period, even during the distributions. In view of this, all volunteers and staff were oriented on safety and personal preparedness measures.

WIDER IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

Apart from providing an immediate repair, the temporary shelters also became a **stepping-stone for families to transition to permanent housing solutions**. The types of housing construction that were hardest hit by the earthquakes – those constructed out of mud, stone and timber – were also those where salvaged materials could be used, in conjunction with the Transitional Shelter Kits, to rebuild.

Additionally, the design adopted in this response, adjusted from the experience in Pakistan, proved to be extremely effective in Nepal. **Through coordination, this solution eventually inspired a standard supported by the Cluster** and adopted by numerous other organizations.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED



Temporary shelters, built with the materials provided, bridged the gap during reconstruction of more permanent houses (here, in Kavrepalanchok district).



The level of community participation in the project was very high.

STRENGTHS

+ High community participation. More than 1,000 community volunteers were mobilized for the distribution of the kits. Partner organizations, local youth clubs, social mobilizers and community leaders partook in the distributions.

+ Project implemented rapidly and at scale, particularly for the first batch of kits, which were distributed in less than three months after the first earthquake.

+ Coordination with local government and like-minded organizations leveraged resources, avoiding duplications and strengthening networks, therefore creating opportunities for longer-term recovery efforts.

+ Produced and distributed 5,000 instruction manuals on various options for temporary shelters to affected communities. Furthermore, families were provided with technical assistance for temporary shelters, through orientations on various construction techniques and safe reuse of materials.

Materials	Units	Quantity
CGI sheets 0.35mm thick, 12ft long	pcs	10
Steel reinforcing rod (re-bar) 12mm diameter, 24ft long	pcs	4
Steel pipe, 15mm diameter, 20ft long	pcs	8
Galvanized iron wire, 16 gauge	kg	1.5
Roofing nails, Umbrella type	kg	1.5
Nails, large (75mm) and medium (40mm), galvanized	kg	1.5
Tin Snips	pcs	1
Pliers	pcs	1

WEAKNESSES

- The earthquake directly affected the organizations' local staff, who could not resume functions quickly. Customized disaster response trainings (specifically on shelter interventions in emergencies) should have been provided to key staff and volunteers involved in shelter response activities.

- Lack of clearly defined, internal, procurement procedures caused a delay in the start-up phase of the project. Internally, different organizational stakeholders had varying degrees of understanding of what processes needed to be in place, prior to procuring relief materials. This breakdown in communication resulted in materials being procured too slowly, as non-emergency processes were being utilized.

- Shortage in medium-term disaster response staff. The organization had an experienced disaster-response team in the region, which deployed immediately after the earthquake to set up a response framework and mobilize the national team. However, **longer-term field positions took months to be filled.** This was due to slow HR processes and waiting for longer-term funding to be secured. This delay caused initially deployed staff to become burned out, and delayed the scale-up of programming.

- The assistance provided focused too heavily on a set design. After about two months, people had recovered to a certain level with whatever resources were available, and they were capable to build contextually better shelters than the semi-circular ones promoted by the organization. Regardless, the same kit continued to be distributed and the same design recommended, rather than broader advice and support to build safe structures of different kinds. This would have been more appropriate, given that M&E findings showed that the majority of the families built the shelters with their own designs.

LEARNINGS

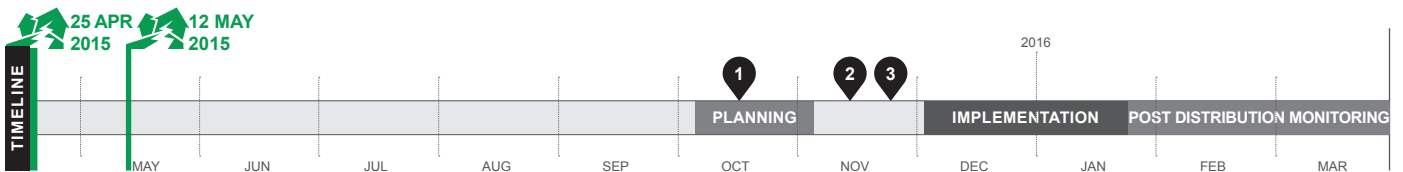
- **Programmes should be designed according to social, cultural, religious, infrastructural and geographical factors of the affected areas.** The shelter design and materials distributed in the emergency phase should enable the affected population to construct durable shelters, using other local/salvaged materials.
- **The situation changes very quickly during the disaster response period,** hence the team needs to be **flexible and proactive,** making necessary adjustments to the programme accordingly. Flexibility can be integrated by improving damage and needs assessments, incorporating secondary information and joint shelter assessment reports.
- **Feedback mechanisms reported an interest in cash-for-work activities,** as a way to increase community participation and ownership.
- **Blanket targeting of most-affected areas was easier in certain communities,** though more prioritization exercises were needed in partially affected areas.
- **It is very important to manage communities' expectations, so as not to create aid dependency,** but rather building on each community's own strengths and resources. In some instances, the communities demanded more materials than they required. Community-led, transparent, beneficiary selection, verification and control mechanisms can manage this.

CASE STUDY

NEPAL 2015-2016 / EARTHQUAKE

KEYWORDS: Winterization, Cash/Vouchers, NFI distribution, Shelter upgrades, Protection

CRISIS	Nepal Earthquakes, 25 April 2015 and 12 May 2015	
TOTAL HOUSES DAMAGED	604,930 fully damaged. 288,856 partially damaged.	
TOTAL PEOPLE AFFECTED	886,456 affected families. 649,815 displaced families.	
PROJECT LOCATIONS	Sindhupalchok, Gorkha, Dhading, Nuwakot and Dolakha districts.	
BENEFICIARIES	15,480 households. Females 51%; Children 45% - Adults 35% - Elderly 20%.	
PROJECT OUTPUTS (households)	7,801 vouchers for winterization 2,510 cash grants for shelter enhancements 5,169 winterization kits	
MATERIALS COST	USD 126 (for e-vouchers and cash grants). USD 130 (for winterization kits).	
PROJECT COST	USD 160 per household (including staffing costs, air lifting and road transportation).	
		<p>PROJECT SUMMARY</p> <p>The project provided winterization support in high and remote areas to 15,480 vulnerable and marginalized households in five of the worst affected districts, through the delivery of e-vouchers for winter and shelter enhancement, cash grants for shelter enhancement and winterization kits (clothing and shelter materials).</p>



- 1** Oct 2015: Market assessments carried out in seven affected areas.
- 2** Nov 2015: Focus group discussions with children and women. Community meeting and consultations with local government to identify key needs.
- 3** 26 Nov 2015: End of state of emergency.

STRENGTHS

- + Effectiveness of the e-voucher modality, accountability, and learning.
- + Cash grants and e-vouchers enabled families to prioritize their winterization needs.
- + Effective targeting of the most marginalized communities.
- + Community participation ensured 90% of items were as requested by beneficiaries.
- + Promotion of local economy and support to recovery.
- + Coordination with local authorities and use of pre-existing systems.

WEAKNESSES

- Issues in controlling prices in local markets.
- Lack of proper communication on the modality led to hesitation amongst local traders.
- Poor accessibility of distribution points.
- Lack of transportation support for some beneficiaries.
- Delays in the winterization kits response.
- Non-replicability of the e-voucher system developed.
- Online monitoring system had issues due to poor connectivity.

CONTEXT

See overview A.3 for more information on the country background and overall shelter response.

Geographic and climatic conditions in Nepal vary greatly, and temperatures can reach -10°C in high mountainous regions, with heavy snowfall from December to February. Remote communities in these areas are several walking days from district capitals, and are accessible only by porters or via air transport.

In general, communities living in high altitude regions are well prepared for harsh winters and use a number of coping mechanisms to withstand the cold temperatures. These include insulating their homes (e.g. thick wall construction, insulating their roofs using locally sourced materials), space heating (e.g. coal burning stoves, electric and gas heaters) and wearing warm clothing (traditional woven Yak and Wool clothing).

In terms of housing supply, owner-built is the predominant mode, which makes quality control critical. Furthermore, a significant proportion of this stock is inadequate to withstand extreme weather conditions.

SITUATION AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

Following the powerful aftershocks, large-scale landslides occurred in multiple locations, three months after the initial earthquake, and many families were still living in temporary shelters or in their damaged homes. These temporary solutions were not sufficient to protect against the severe monsoon rains, nor did they provide adequate protection from the approaching winter months. Dalits and other minority groups were particularly affected in comparison with other communities.

LOCATIONS AND BENEFICIARY SELECTION

The five selected districts were some of the worst affected by the earthquakes, with almost all homes having been destroyed. A preliminary assessment for the selection of Village Development Committees (VDC)¹ and beneficiaries for winterization support was conducted in coordination with relevant government authorities and the Shelter Cluster. The communities for winterization and shelter enhancement support were selected based on the altitude (above 1,500m) and other vulnerability criteria (women, children, elderly households, persons with disabilities, number of children, status of the house, marginalized groups and income). Continuous coordination with VDC officials, local stakeholders and partner NGOs was crucial during this data collection process. Pre-selected beneficiaries were then verified with the vulnerability criteria and a scoring tool. The final lists were approved by the local government and committees involved.

Due to accessibility challenges, the initial implementation method was modified to a dual approach of cash/e-vouchers and distribution of kits.

MARKET ASSESSMENTS AND CONSULTATIONS

Market assessments were conducted in the nearest markets to working VDCs by the logistics team, programme team and casual labour that was trained to support the activity. The parameters for the assessment were the following:

- **Accessibility:** walking distance from the nearest functioning market (3 days walk was considered inaccessible) and the altitude of the affected community (more than 3,000m above sea level was deemed inaccessible).
- **Capacity:** market ability to supply and meet the demand.
- **Willingness** of the suppliers and beneficiaries to engage in the process.
- **Quality of materials:** assessed by Shelter Cluster technical team, with the support from the organization and the affected people as well. Government guidelines and organizational quality check benchmarks were used.

A meeting was called for all interested merchants and the process, provision, rule and regulation of the e-voucher system was explained, allowing all interested merchants to fill in a form. Further on, **community sessions were held** in order to identify the most pressing item needs for redeeming the e-vouchers. **A survey of the market and prices was carried out** and the selected merchants were verified in their capacity of stocking and restocking, and in their legal registration with the chamber of commerce.

After this process, five out of the seven markets were included in the process and framework agreements were established with 28 merchants in Gorkha and 50 in Sindhupalchok.

¹ VDCs are the lower administrative parts of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development.



Many areas were accessible only by several days of walking.

SELECTION OF DELIVERY MODALITIES

The key factors influencing the selection of modalities were **geographical location, availability of materials in markets and recognition that affected communities have pre-existing knowledge and strategies** to withstand cold winter temperatures. If markets were functioning, the use of cash grants and e-vouchers were deemed more appropriate than in-kind assistance, as they contributed to strengthen existing supply chains and therefore stimulate recovery. Cash grants and vouchers also gave beneficiaries the flexibility to choose according to their own diverse needs and priorities what best supported their household². Cash grants were used in communities with access to banking facilities and where it was less likely that this modality would be misused. On the other hand, when communities were in hard-to-reach areas (above 3,000m), or markets were not functioning or accessible, the distribution of a winterization kit was used instead.

E-VOUCHER SYSTEM

The e-voucher system was implemented using a simple smart phone application, partnering with the service provider Hello Paisa for technical support and the Civil Bank for transactions.

As part of the framework agreements with traders, specifications were set and agreed (as per national and international standards). Traders were then provided with a list of potential items that beneficiaries were likely to purchase, enabling them to stock accordingly.

A PIN card with ten secret digits was provided to beneficiaries who showed their identity card and Earthquake Victim Card number. Beneficiaries were provided with training and information on the markets where they would be able to redeem the vouchers. The selected merchants were also trained on the use of the App and how to upload their purchases through a simple mobile network. **As this was a new system in Nepal, beneficiaries and merchants were supported during the process by staff members**, who were present in the markets daily and accessible through a telephone hotline.

The e-voucher system allowed the beneficiaries to choose from a list of 36 pre-agreed items divided in three categories:

- **House and personal insulation materials:** CGI sheets, ridge sheet, tarpaulins, insulating p-foam, mattress, mat, woollen or fleece blankets, etc.
- **Winter clothes:** sweater, jacket, woollen caps, socks, shoes, underwear, and children and women's clothes.
- **Kitchen utensils:** vacuum flask, cooker, heating stoves, cooking stoves, etc.

² See opinion piece B.2 in *Shelter Projects 2011-2012*, on cash-based assistance in shelter programmes.



The winterization kits were distributed in high-altitude communities, where lack of markets and/or poor accessibility made the use of cash not viable.

CASH GRANTS

An operations booklet was produced in conjunction with beneficiaries and distributed with the cash grants, outlining clear do's and don'ts regarding the use of the grant. Post distribution monitoring indicated that 96% of the households who received cash grants spent it on shelter enhancement.

IN-KIND WINTERIZATION KITS

Comprehensive consultations were carried out with children, women, the wider community and local authorities to establish needs and items required. Once the information was compiled across the different communities, in collaboration with the Shelter Cluster and the government, a standardized kit was agreed upon, meeting Sphere standards and IFRC guidelines. Kits were then compiled and distributed by vehicle, on foot or by helicopter. The items included a combination of thermal clothing, blankets and heating items.

PROJECT MONITORING

The organization established three types of monitoring:

- **On the spot, real time:** monitoring committees were formed consisting of community representatives, technical staff from the organization and representatives of the local authority. Their main role was to monitor transaction-related activities, solve issues and complaints and to check the quality and price of materials.
- **Online system:** all the transactions were monitored online through a portal which was specifically designed by the local service provider. The system monitored the number of transactions, quantity of materials and other procurement parameters. Whenever an item was purchased, an SMS was sent to the portal, and these were then compared with manual records, allowing for greater transparency and the ability to analyse purchasing patterns. Once a transaction was verified, a payment authorization was made 36 hours later. This ensured quality of materials at competitive prices. Those suppliers who failed to adhere to these standards were suspended from the framework agreements for a period of time.
- **Post Distribution Monitoring:** PDM was conducted one month after distribution, in coordination with local administration, Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries and representatives of the suppliers.

Variations in the use of e-vouchers between districts were identified. For example, 72% of the targeted beneficiaries in the district of Gorkha prioritized construction materials, whereas 58% of those in Sindhupalchok prioritized personal insulation items/clothes. This indicated that the e-voucher system allowed better targeting of needs.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

During the winterization programme, communities were encouraged to participate in the planning of activities through briefing meetings that explained the programme and mapping exercise, group discussions and participatory prioritization exercises that were used to identify community and household priorities for winter and shelter enhancement items. Over 90% of the items identified by the community were included in the winterization kits, were used for the markets assessments and formed part of the items on the voucher programme.

COORDINATION

Coordination at the national and district level was important for beneficiary selection and avoiding duplication. The values of the e-vouchers, cash grants and winterization kit were jointly calculated to meet minimum requirements and agreed with the Shelter Cluster, Nepalese Government and VDCs.

MAIN CHALLENGES

A key challenge was due to the **impact of fuel shortages**. In September 2015, the Government of India imposed a blockade that lasted until February 2016, leading to substantial shortages of fuel, construction materials and other essential supplies across Nepal. The subsequent fuel crisis caused delays in the distribution and affected the households who received e-vouchers, as few local suppliers had the ability to restock items.

Inflation also affected the procurement of winterization kits and the cost of the items that could be redeemed with the vouchers. However, allowing beneficiaries to choose and bargain for their selected items helped mitigate this challenge.

Initially, the majority of beneficiaries who received e-vouchers were **unable to purchase items at competitive rates**, despite agreements with traders. To overcome this issue jointly, a monitoring committee was formed consisting of representatives from the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries, local administration, a community representative and the organization's technical staff.

In terms of **accessibility challenges**, the organization coordinated with government authorities to access fuel supplies for the humanitarian response and received support from the Logistic Cluster for the transportation of kits. Helicopters were used to distribute kits to particularly hard-to-reach communities before the winter started, as well as assisting the communities served with e-vouchers to transport redeemed materials from the suppliers. This was not needed for those who received cash grants, as their communities had functioning markets.

WIDER IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

- The project reached about 19% of the vulnerable families in need of winterization support nationally. **After this intervention, the government also distributed cash amounts of USD 100 to the remaining families.**
- The distribution of e-vouchers and cash grants (equivalent to USD 1.7 million) was injected directly into local markets, **supporting the local economy**. This cash flow helped local suppliers to rebuild and expand their business and ultimately supported recovery of the worst hit areas.
- **The e-voucher system is now established as a modality for future support.** It was the first time this system was used in the area, so the Organization trained both beneficiaries and traders, providing a level of preparedness in case of future emergencies.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

+ Effectiveness. Using the e-voucher modality allowed for effective and efficient data collection and analysis, hence for greater accountability, transparency and learning. The ability to capture purchase patterns, prices and suppliers' details enabled the organization to have a better understanding of beneficiaries' priorities and the local context.

+ Empowerment. Cash grants and e-vouchers enabled families to prioritize their winterization needs.

+ Targeting marginalized communities. Effective vulnerability targeting ensured 80% of beneficiaries reached were from Dalits and other marginalized communities, including 550 households with persons with disabilities.

+ Participation. Consulting vulnerable community members for improved programme design and delivery: effective community participation ensured 90% of winterization items distributed were as requested by beneficiaries (excluding compulsory children's clothing).

+ Supporting recovery. Promotion of local economy, by injecting USD 1.7 million into the local market. This cash flow helped local suppliers to expand their business and ultimately supported recovery and reconstruction phase.

+ Cooperation with local authorities to ensure full support for the project modalities

+ Utilizing pre-existing mechanisms and systems, such as Earthquake Victim Cards issued by the government as a source of verification for beneficiaries' eligibility.



In remote regions, winterization kits were provided to the most vulnerable households. As there were no other means of transportation, the kits were airlifted and dispatched.

WEAKNESSES

- Issues in market monitoring. Initially, most beneficiaries were unable to redeem the e-vouchers at competitive rates. Good coordination with relevant stakeholders later solved this.

- Poor dissemination of information on the modality. Local traders were initially hesitant to participate in the e-voucher programming as the modality was new. This could have been mitigated with better dissemination of information about cash-transfer programming and processes, e.g. through local media.

- Accessibility of distribution points. Post-Distribution Monitoring indicated that beneficiaries had to walk for approx. 2.5 hours to reach the distribution point. Walking distances could have been reduced if distribution points were at different VDCs/wards (or at a central location chosen with the communities). This could have been achieved through better community engagement at planning and implementation stages.

- Support for transportation. 52% of households reported that they did not receive any support for transport of materials. Transport support for beneficiaries was considered, but due to the costs only about half of the total beneficiaries were prioritized for this assistance.

- Delays in the response. As part of the PDM feedback, beneficiaries suggested they would have benefited more from the winterization kit if it had been distributed approx. 45 days earlier.

- Non-replicability. The phone application developed and used was not open source and therefore could not be utilized by others. However, the app developer has since partnered with other organizations to develop an e-voucher app to deliver humanitarian assistance in Nepal.

- Online monitoring mechanism. Poor internet connections at times made it difficult to monitor transactions.

Winterization kit components	Quantity
Gloves, size small	2
Thermal coat (suit and trousers), child: 1 small + 1 medium	2
Wool cap, 2 child + 1 adult	3
Scarf for children	2
Thermal socks, 2 small child + 2 medium child	4
Leggings, 1 small child + 1 medium child + 1 adult	3
Solar sweater, free size for adult	2
Scarf, for adults	1
Thermal socks (pair), for adults	4
Fleece blanket (high quality)	2
Woolen blanket (army)	2
Fleece jacket	1
Thermos for warm beverages (1 litre)	1
Logoed carrying bag	1

LEARNINGS

- Beneficiaries choice.** Beneficiaries are active responders after a disaster and are best placed to decide what their household needs are. Therefore, cash-based assistance should be considered over in-kind were appropriate.
- Efficiency and support to recovery of cash vs in-kind.** Cash grants and vouchers can be faster to distribute (especially at scale) and more cost-efficient (eliminating logistical and import costs) than in-kind. In addition, this modality can stimulate local markets, helping the recovery of trade and local economy, therefore benefitting more than the direct recipients.
- Conditional cash.** Conditional cash allows for quality and technical restrictions to be placed, for effective shelter and NFI outcomes. However robust monitoring tools are needed to ensure that the value for money and the quality in construction and shelter-NFI outputs are achieved.
- Distribution committees.** The formation of distribution committees is a vital method for effective mobilization, security and solving distribution-related issues at community level.