



# Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1: June 2015

Synthesis Report



The Asia Foundation





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**The Asia Foundation**



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## Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1: **Synthesis Report**

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# Preface

Responding effectively to disasters requires knowledge of the needs of the affected, how they evolve over time, and the effectiveness of aid in addressing these. The international aid apparatus is a well-oiled disaster response machine. Within days, emergency relief can be deployed, pulling bodies from rubble and providing basic sustenance and shelter to those who have lost their homes. A now-standardized tool, the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, provides information on what immediate needs are and estimates the financial costs of replacing infrastructure and repairing economic damage and impacts on different sectors such as health and education. This helps determine the overall level of official development assistance and government money needed to repair damage, compensate for losses, and determines where and on what such money should go. This usually becomes the basis for a joint early recovery and development plan which guides the response over the short, medium, and longer terms.

Such damage assessments are valuable but their focus on quantifying impacts and costs means key information needed for disaster responses to be effective and accountable is missed. Issues such as local social relations are important, for recovery requires communities to work together to overcome their

challenges. Politics and leadership, at the local and higher levels, will help determine the extent to which aid is employed effectively. Understanding how local structures and norms change over time requires in-depth research in affected communities.

Further, ‘one shot’ assessments, conducted shortly after the disaster, are unable to capture how social, economic, and political impacts—and associated needs—change over time. The evolution of such needs will not only be a function of the intensity and nature of the impacts of the disaster but also of the disaster *response*. Aid may replace people’s homes, get people working again, or avert disease; however, it may also have negative impacts on the social and economic fabric, for example, by accentuating competition over scarce resources or changing local power relations. Understanding these evolving impacts and needs at the local level, and the interaction with the provision of aid, is vital for the effective delivery of emergency, early recovery, and development assistance. This requires continued visits to communities to see how things are changing.

This report is part of a larger, longer-term project aimed at tracking changing needs, and the impact of aid responses, in areas of Nepal that were affected by two devastating earthquakes in April and May 2015. The

report presents combined findings from in-depth fieldwork and a large representative quantitative household survey conducted at the same time, around two months after the first quake. Two research reports, released in parallel, provide details of the findings from the in-depth fieldwork and the quantitative survey. In order to track changes over time,

future rounds of work—two per year—are planned.

We hope that the findings will help aid providers, Nepali and international alike, respond effectively to support the recovery of the affected, while preparing Nepal for the next time disaster hits.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Barron', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small horizontal line extending to the right.

**Patrick Barron**  
Regional Director for Conflict & Development  
The Asia Foundation

# Acknowledgements

**T**his report summarizes and synthesizes findings from in-depth qualitative fieldwork and a large quantitative survey conducted in earthquake-affected areas. It was written by Lena Michaels, Sasiwan Chingchit, and Patrick Barron.

The qualitative work was conducted by researchers from Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN), led by Sudip Pokharel. Analysis of the data was done by Anurag Devkota, Lena Michaels, Sudip Pokharel, Charlotte Ramble, Jacob Rinck, and Luke Wagner, with inputs from Sasiwan Chingchit and Patrick Barron. Special thanks goes to the team of researchers for their dedication in the field: the lead researchers Anubhav Ajeet, Amy Leigh Johnson, Subhash Lamichhane, Shekhar Parajulee, Nayan Pokharel, and Ujjwal Prasai; and researchers Garima Adhikari, Prapti Adhikari, Sara Devkota, Ujjwal Ram Ghimire, Rukh Gurung, Tanka Gurung, Chitra Magar, Chiran Manandhar, Binu Sharma, Shahani Singh, and Aakash Upraity.

The survey was implemented by a team from Interdisciplinary Analysts (IDA), led by Sudhindra Sharma. The data was analyzed

by Anup Phayal, Sunil Pillai, Sasiwan Chingchit, and Patrick Barron.

A number of other people provided useful inputs at various stages, including in the formation of the research questions, finalization of the sample, and analysis of the data. They include George Varughese, Ed Anderson, and Nandita Baruah. Thanit Herabat provided research assistance and Lavinia Tyrrel and Mim Koletschka assisted with editorial support.

The Asia Foundation (TAF) wish to express their appreciation to the many people who made this report possible, particularly informants and survey respondents in Bhaktapur, Dang, Dhading, Dolakha, Gorkha, Kathmandu, Khotang, Lamjung, Manang, Makwanpur, Nuwakot, Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchok, Solukhumbu, Syangja,

Financial support for the work was provided by UK aid from the UK Government. Andy Murray, Tom Wingfield, Ed Bell and Ben Powis from the Department for International Development (DFID) provided useful inputs and guidance.

# Executive Summary

**O**n 25 April 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal. Thousands were killed, tens of thousands were injured, and hundreds of thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed. A second major earthquake struck less than three weeks later.

Aid providers quickly responded. But developing effective plans for long-term sustainable recovery requires learning from relief efforts to date and understanding the needs

and challenges that lie ahead. The Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal (IRM) project contributes to this by assessing longitudinally five issues – aid delivery and effectiveness; politics and leadership; social relations and conflict; protection and vulnerability; and economy and livelihoods. This report synthesizes findings from a quantitative survey and qualitative research conducted mid-late June 2015.

## **The impacts of the earthquake**

Housing destruction was widespread in highly impacted districts. Elsewhere there were pockets of severe impact. In our high impact districts, 86% of survey respondents reported that their house was destroyed or still uninhabitable two months on from the first quake. In many medium and lower impact districts, levels of destruction were higher than aggregated district level data reveals. The impacts were greater in rural and remote areas.

The scale of destruction was partly a result of the poor quality of housing in high impact districts. Most houses in high impact areas were made from mud mortar and collapsed, while the relatively few concrete and pillar houses were rarely substantially impacted.

The poor and farmers were most likely to have lost their homes. In high impact areas, most people are living in self-constructed temporary shelters. Schools were the most affected public infrastructure. The earthquakes had the largest impacts on the incomes of business people. The impact on farming was relatively low except where there had been, or were risks of, landslides. The impact on laborers was mixed: wages went up for some but others were laid off. Tourism was badly hit.

There has been little sales of assets; these were restricted to the sale of livestock. Borrowing has increased, in particular amongst those highly impacted. People are most frequently turning to relatives or money-

lenders for cash with few taking bank loans. Remittances have continued. There was little

labor migration in the two months following the earthquakes.

### **The aid effort**

Aid distribution was initially chaotic leading to tensions. After the formalization of government mechanisms, relief coordination vastly improved, with District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs) and VDC relief distribution committees (RDCs) playing an important role. In general, government coordination mechanisms at the district level and below performed well. However, there were some limitations to these related to a lack of transparency and accountability.

The government was seen by victims as being the largest provider of aid, potentially because of the ‘one door’ policy, with all aid materials to be channeled through the government. Aid in the first two months largely focused on emergency relief. Cash went out but reached fewer people than expected and at lower levels than government policies state. There were vast differences across districts in who received cash. Delayed and partial distribution of government cash grants related to difficulties in the process of identifying beneficiaries.

There is evidence of substantial mistargeting of aid: both inclusion and exclusion errors.

Many in highly impacted wards in medium impact districts missed out. The government classification of damage at the district level seemed to greatly influence the number of organizations that provided aid and the attention that a district received. This meant that highly impacted people in less impacted wards received little aid compared to the less affected in high impact districts. Aid reached remote areas with those far from the district headquarters at least as likely to have received assistance as those living closer. It took time, however, for aid to reach remote areas.

Contentment with the government’s disaster response was mixed. There was higher satisfaction with the conduct of VDCs in allocating aid. People in affected areas were highly satisfied with the performance of Nepal’s security forces. Foreign agencies and NGOs received mixed responses. Dissatisfaction over beneficiary selection for government compensation was high. Two months from the earthquake, people still had many immediate needs, prioritizing they needed corrugated iron sheets and cash. Over time, cash will become even more important.

### **Politics and leadership**

There were no significant changes in the role of political parties and their leaders since the earthquakes. There was little politicization of relief at the local level. Political parties were most commonly accused of having interfered in the outcome of damage and needs assessments, especially in medium

and low impact districts where assessments were more contentious. New leadership figures did not emerge after the earthquake.

Dissatisfaction with the role political parties played in responding to the earthquake was high. Constituent Assembly members

rarely visited earthquake-affected areas. The impacts on political preferences is unclear. The majority of people remained undecided on who they will vote for in future elections.

This may be a result of disillusionment with parties and politics. The performance of parties in responding to the earthquakes may affect future voting choices.

### **Social relations and conflict**

Crime and violence were not major issues in the two months following the earthquake. Most people felt safe and few reported violence as having occurred. Social cohesion and intra-community solidarity at the local level, especially in rural areas, remained

strong or even increased after the earthquake. Resentment over damage assessments and beneficiary lists, and grievances related to resettlement, could lead to conflicts in the future.

### **Vulnerability**

Lower caste and indigenous groups were not disproportionately affected by the earthquakes. They did not appear to be discriminated against in accessing most types of aid but they were much less likely to have received cash. They were also less likely to be satisfied with aid providers and less likely to think VDCs were distributing aid fairly. Structural inequalities and prevalent forms of exclusion and discrimination are likely to negatively affect the recovery of lower castes in the longer run. They face greater difficulties accessing credit. Where they borrow, it is much more likely to be from moneylenders who charge higher interest rates.

for men. Children and elderly were under great distress in many areas.

The displaced faced greater uncertainty and were more vulnerable to diseases, threats and exploitation. Many did not know whether they would be able to return to their land and could not plan ahead. Inadequate beneficiary lists may mean that households miss out on assistance.

Women did not appear to have been disproportionately affected by the earthquake and were accessing aid. There were no substantial differences in the perceived safety of men and women and there have been very few incidents of abuses targeting women. Nevertheless, some, in particular single and widowed women, faced risks and uncertainties that were not present to the same extent

## Implications

There are a number of implications for those seeking to support recovery in earthquake-affected areas, structured around the following:

### I. Improving aid distribution

- Utilize and improve VDC mechanisms for aid coordination
- Ensure assistance reaches high impact wards in medium impact districts
- Be aware of the dangers of individual targeting based on current assessments
- Develop mechanisms that allow for the sharing of cash and support across households
- Communicate government policies and plans more clearly

### II. Key areas for future aid

- Focus on building back better
- Provide cash and access to credit
- Develop geological landslide assessments and resettlement plans
- Develop programs for the recovery of small businesses
- Have an extra focus on the vulnerable

### III. Ongoing monitoring

- Continue systematic monitoring of evolving needs and patterns of recovery

## List of Acronyms

APM	All Party Mechanism
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
DDRC	District Disaster Relief Committee
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
HQ	(District) headquarters
IDA	Interdisciplinary Analysts
INGO	International non-governmental organization
LGCDP	Local Governance and Community Development Programme
MJF-D	Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum-Democratic
MJF-N	Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum-Nepal
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPR	Nepali Rupees
PDNA	Post-Disaster Needs Assessment
RDC	Relief Distribution Committee
RPP	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
RPP-N	Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal
UCPN(M)	Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCF	Ward Citizen Forum

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Photo: Tenzing Paljor

# 1. INTRODUCTION

A devastating earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015, killing thousands, injuring tens of thousands more, and damaging and destroying hundreds of thousands of houses along with public infrastructure. Less than three weeks later, on 12 May, another major quake hit, bringing further destruction and misery. Since then, aid providers—Nepali and international—have mobilized, providing emergency relief and, over time, cash and in-kind support aimed at helping the affected recover.

Nepal now needs to plan for robust and durable recovery. Doing so effectively requires learning from post-disaster efforts to date: by assessing how effective the aid response has been; how the challenges that people in the earthquake zone face have changed since the initial days, and what challenges will likely emerge in the coming months; and how the earthquakes, and the disaster response, shape economic recovery, social relations, leadership, and politics.

## 1.1 Rationale and objectives

The Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal (IRM-Nepal) project aims to contribute toward ensuring effective responses to the earthquakes through research focused on understanding various factors that shape the degree and nature of the recovery. Many of the effects of the disasters will play out over the longer term. The nature and modalities of aid will also change, as goals evolve. An effective aid response must fit with local needs. And it must be built upon an understanding of what issues are emerging, what is constraining recovery, and which segments of the population are most at risk.

Through longitudinal field-based monitoring and regular large-sample survey work, IRM-Nepal considers a range of micro-level issues shaping aid delivery and effectiveness and, ultimately, recovery. The impacts of the earthquake and the response on local communities and their ability to recover are examined through four focus areas: (i) economy and livelihoods; (ii) social relations and conflict; (iii) protection and vulnerability; and (iv) politics and leadership (Figure 1.1).

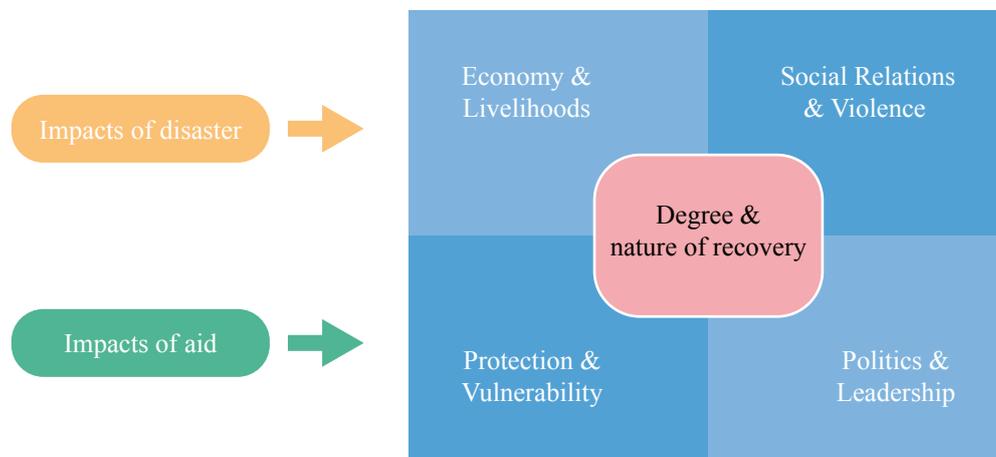


Figure 1.1: Analytic framework



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

## 1.2 Methodology

This report presents findings from the first round of IRM-Nepal, conducted 6-8 weeks after the 25 April quake. In doing so, it synthesizes findings from a large representative survey and in-depth qualitative fieldwork.<sup>1</sup>

The qualitative research involved teams conducting interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation in

six districts which varied in earthquake impacts: Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, and Gorkha (highly impacted); Makwanpur and Okhaldhunga (medium impact), and Syangja (low impact)—see Box 1. Research teams visited 16 village development committees (VDCs) and two municipalities, with two wards studied in each. Research took three-four days per VDC and was supplemented by district-level interviews. Sampling of locations was done at three levels—district, VDC, and ward—to maximize variation in two factors that were predicted to affect the nature and speed of recovery: the degree of impact of the earthquake; and the degree of remoteness.

<sup>1</sup> The qualitative field research was conducted by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) from 9-27 June. The quantitative survey was conducted by Interdisciplinary Analysts (IDA) from 15-29 June. Full findings are published in two reports released in parallel. Fuller discussions of the methodology are outlined in the two reports.

The survey comprised face-to-face interviews with 2,980 respondents randomly selected from 240 VDCs and municipalities across 14 of 26 earthquake-affected districts, along with 298 ward leaders. Data collection took place in: Nuwakot, Sindhupalchok, Ramechhap, Gorkha, Solukhumbu, and Dhading (high impact); Bhaktapur, Okhaldhunga, Lamjung, Manang, and Kathmandu (medium impact); and Syangja, Khotang,

and Dang (low impact). The household sample was distributed equally among men and women aged over 18 who are involved in household decision-making in the household. The sample represents the broader population of the 26 districts where 95% of earthquake housing damage was incurred. Maps 1 and 2 show locations for the qualitative and quantitative research.

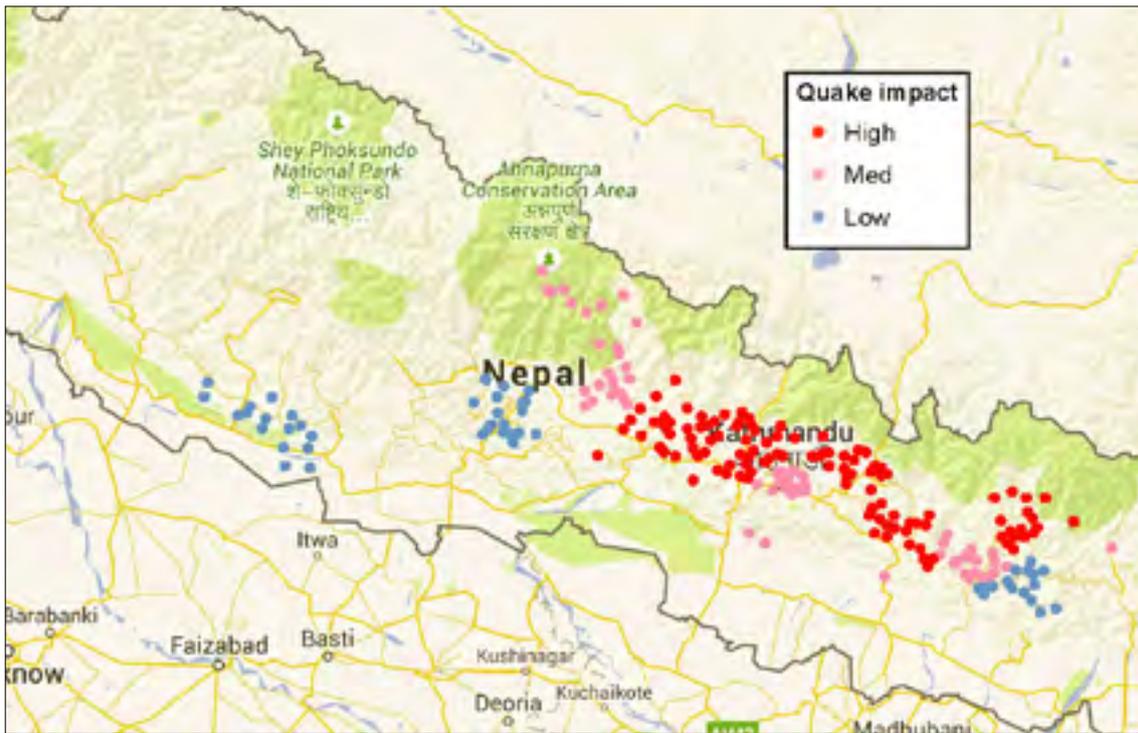
### **Box 1: What is a high impact district and ward?**

Throughout the report, we classify districts and wards by their level of impact from the earthquakes. These classifications are used to see whether there are systematic differences between places with different levels of impact in terms of levels of aid received, patterns of recovery, and issues that are emerging.

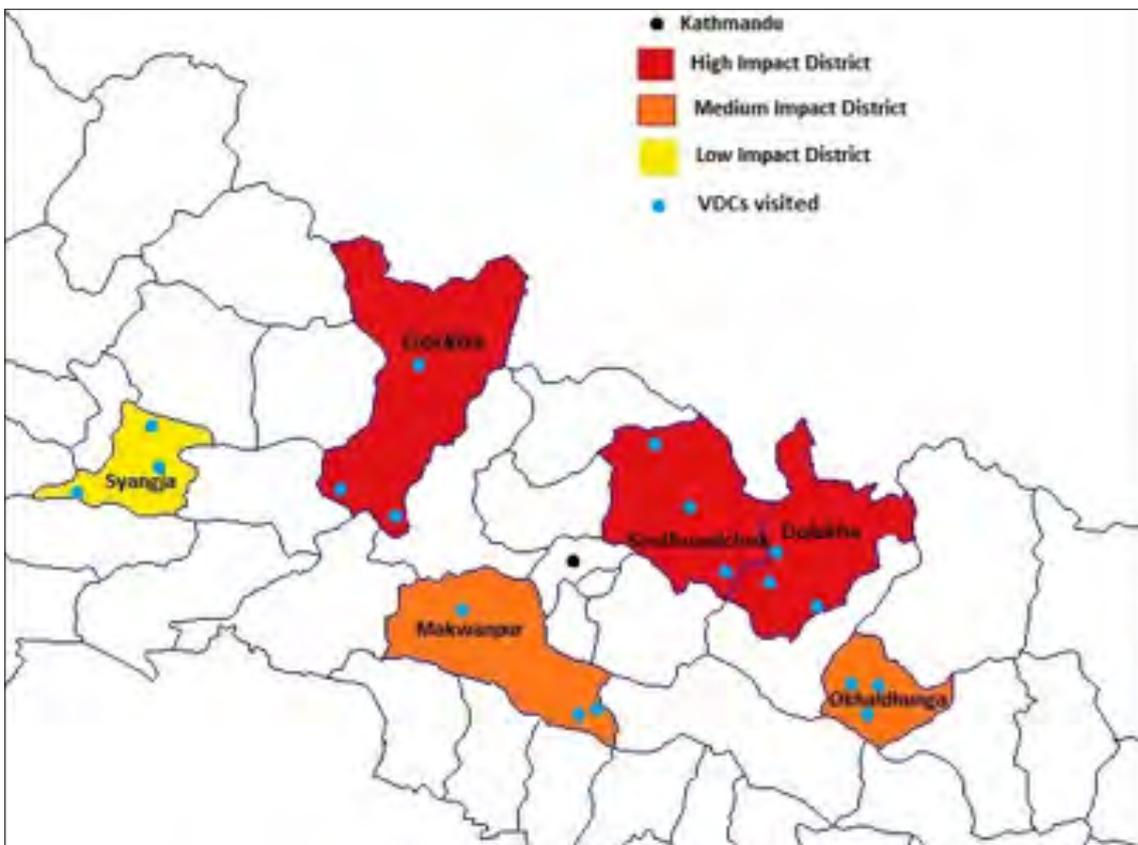
Districts were classified as being high, medium or low impact based on government data on the extent of housing damage (data available at <http://drrportal.gov.np/>). High impact districts are those where more than half of houses are uninhabitable; medium impact districts are those where 20-50% of houses are uninhabitable; low impact districts are those where 10-20% are uninhabitable.

Wards were also classified by impact using self-reported data from the survey. Wards were categorized as high impact if more than 66% of houses were reported by those surveyed as uninhabitable; medium impact if 33-66% were uninhabitable; and low impact if less than 33% of houses were reported as uninhabitable.

It should be noted that district impact categories used in this report differ from those used in the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA). District classifications used government data available as of May 2015. But the PDNA later developed five categories of districts: severely hit; crisis hit; hit with heavy losses; hit; and slightly affected. Future rounds of analysis will use the PDNA categories.



Map 1: Locations of survey research



Map 2: Locations of qualitative research

## 1.3 What the report can tell us, what it cannot

The methodology for both components of the research was developed to ensure to the greatest degree possible that findings reflect conditions and views in earthquake-affected areas. Nevertheless, and as is the case with every research study, caution should be taken in interpreting findings.

The survey is representative of the full population of the 26 districts. At the aggregate level, there is a margin of error of  $\pm 1.8\%$  at a 95% confidence level. This means that for analyses that include responses from all sampled respondents we can be 95% confident that the given finding is reflective of the true situation across the whole population of

earthquake-affected areas within a range of  $\pm 1.8\%$ . As such, the survey derives accurate estimates at the aggregate level. Where we break down the surveyed population by impact, demographic or other variables (for example, comparing the opinions of men or women, or the impacts in high, medium and low impact districts) the level of accuracy of survey findings reduces. However, we are still reasonably confident that the data and findings reflect the situation on the ground.

Information provided throughout the report on levels of damage and whether people received aid is based on the reports of those interviewed. Individuals may have incentives to over- or under-report the level of impact they have experienced and whether they have received assistance. Some of the research areas and questions, such as whether violence has occurred or who people plan to vote for in the future, are sensitive and some may prefer not to answer them. However, pursuing qualitative and quantitative research in parallel allows us to triangulate findings, giving us more confidence that they reflect reality.

The findings reflect the situation in all parts of the affected districts but not the most remote areas. The quantitative survey sampled wards randomly which meant that very remote wards were included. However, seven wards had to be replaced because they were too far away for teams to reach. Nevertheless, the sample has 18 wards more than 12 hours from the district headquarters and includes one that is 52 hours from the district HQ. Qualitative field teams did



Photo: Aneta Buraityte



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

not visit extremely remote areas, although some locations took more than half a day of walking to reach.

The timing of the research should be noted. Fieldwork commenced around six weeks after the 25 April earthquake. During the period of the research, emergency aid had already been distributed and government mechanisms were relatively well established in most places visited. This timing has several implications. First, the actions of citizen relief groups, as well as NGOs and INGOs, were less visible than they would have been several weeks earlier, when the

distribution of emergency relief was more widespread. As a result, information in this report focuses largely on the government response at the local level. Second, the period was relatively calm with earlier tensions around relief distribution largely resolved and conflicts rare due to an emphasis on equal distribution of incoming aid, strong social cohesion at the local level, and the fact that larger assistance packages were not yet being allocated. Third, findings reflect the situation on-the-ground around two months after the first earthquake. The situation has likely evolved since then. Assessing this is for future rounds of the IRM.

## 1.4 Report structure

This report covers a number of areas:

- *The impacts of the earthquakes*: on property, public infrastructure and facilities, and on people's incomes and financial behavior (Section 2);
- *The aid effort*: the nature of aid provided, people's levels of satisfaction with assistance received and those providing it, and remaining needs (Section 3);
- *Politics and leadership*: the impacts of the earthquake and aid response on political party activities, roles and levels of influence, the emergence of new leadership, and political preferences (Section 4);
- *Social relations and conflict*: the impacts on security, sources of conflict, and social cohesion (Section 5);
- *Vulnerability*: the impacts of the earthquake on different population groups and the extent to which they are vulnerable (Section 6);

The report concludes with a summary of findings and a discussion of some of the implications for the aid effort moving forward.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

## 2. THE IMPACTS OF THE EARTHQUAKES

### 2.1 The spread of housing damage

*Housing destruction was widespread in high impact districts. Elsewhere, there were pockets of severe impact.*

The physical impacts of the disaster were immense in the most affected areas. Survey data shows that the government's initial assessment of damage to housing was fairly accurate. In high impact districts, 72% respondents reported that their house was completely destroyed and 14% that it was partially destroyed, needing significant repairs before they could live there again. Nineteen percent of houses were completely destroyed, and 12% partially destroyed, in the medium impact districts. Only 6% were completely destroyed and 16% partially destroyed in the low impact districts (Figure 2.1).

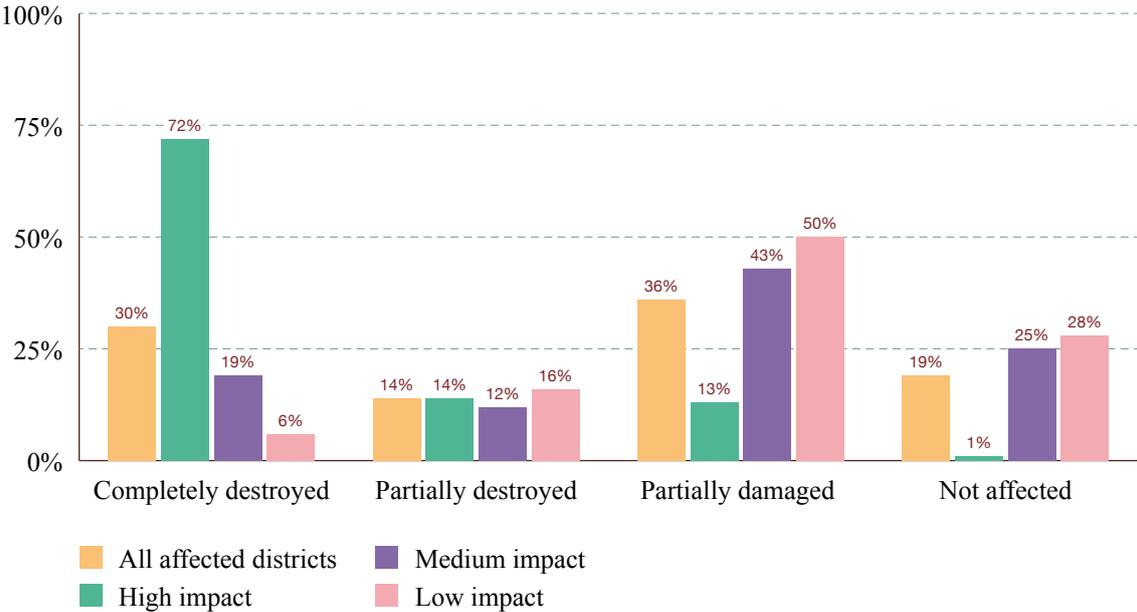


Figure 2.1: Damage to houses – by district earthquake impact

There was significant variation in reported levels of damage between wards within districts and even within VDCs/municipalities. Survey evidence shows that 19% of wards

in high impact districts did not experience great impacts; and 12% of wards in medium-affected districts were highly impacted (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Level of destruction to wards – by district earthquake impact

		WARD IMPACT			
		High	Medium	Low	Total
DISTRICT IMPACT	High	70%	11%	19%	100%
	Medium	12%	14%	74%	100%
	Low	0%	9%	91%	100%

Impacts were especially uneven in medium impact districts, with some wards as affected as those in high impact districts while others saw little damage.

Observations from the field research show that in many wards in medium and low impact districts the levels of destruction were significantly higher than the aggregated district level data revealed. This was particu-

larly acute in the medium affected districts, where the impact was uneven with some wards nearly as highly affected as those in high impact districts (Figure 2.2).

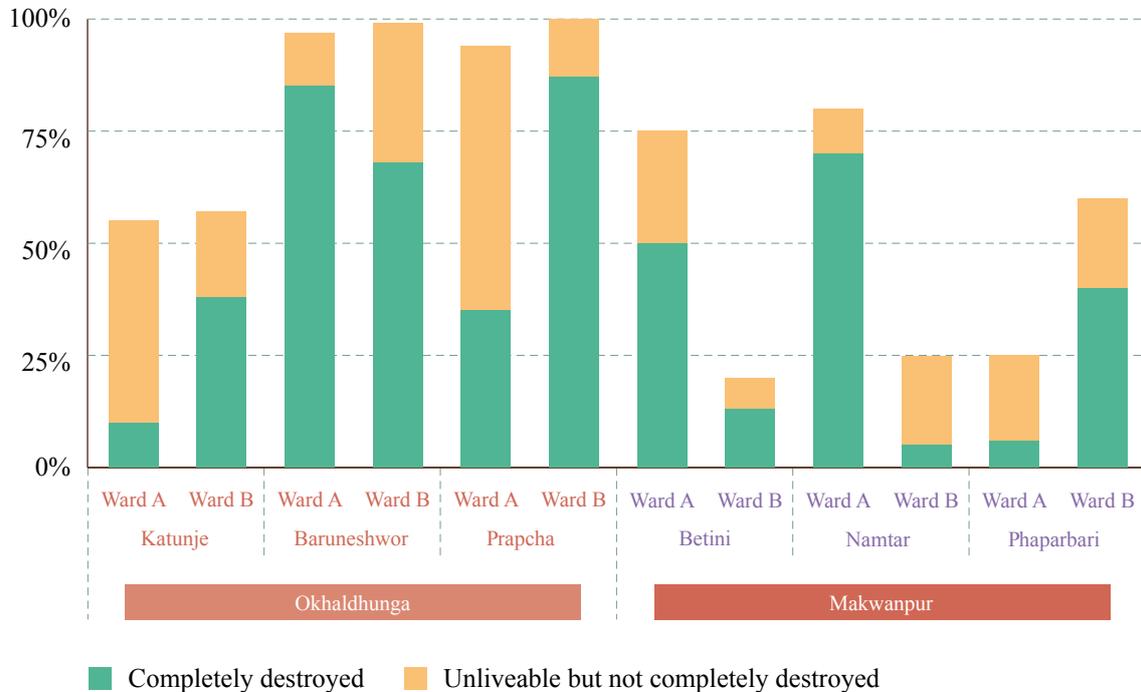


Figure 2.2: Damage to houses in wards visited in medium impact districts (qualitative research)<sup>2</sup>

**Impacts were greater in rural and remote areas.**

The earthquakes affected rural and remote areas more than urban areas.<sup>3</sup> Fifty-one

percent of houses in rural areas were rendered unlivable compared with 26% in

<sup>2</sup> Data is based on information collected by research teams from VDC officials and ward leaders and on direct observations in wards visited. As such, it represents estimates rather than official data on levels of damages.

<sup>3</sup> The government’s rural/urban classification is used. Rural areas are those with Village Development Committees (VDCs); urban areas are those with municipalities. Wards were classified in terms of remoteness based on distance from the district head-

quarters using the quickest means of transportation possible. Wards classified as being very accessible are within one hour of the district HQ (86 wards). Those classified as accessible are 1-3 hours away (91 wards). Quite accessible wards are 3-6 hours from the district HQ (74 wards). Less accessible wards are 6-12 hours away (25 wards). Eighteen wards are more than 12 hours from the district HQ and are classified as being far from the district HQ. In some large wards, more than one enumeration area was selected.

urban areas. Wards that are more accessible to district headquarters on average saw less damage than wards furthest away (Figure 2.3).

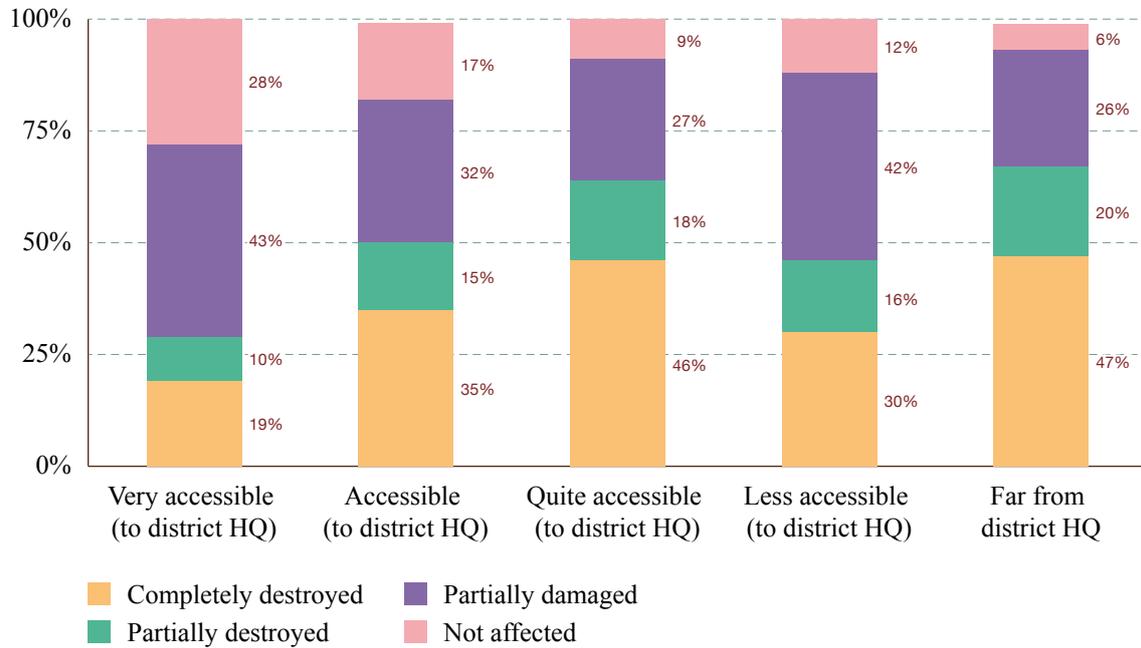


Figure 2.3: Damage to houses – by ward remoteness

## 2.2 Quality of housing and earthquake impacts

*One of the primary reasons why some areas were highly affected and others less so is the quality of housing that was present there.*

Houses made with mud mortar were far more likely to be destroyed than others. Fifty-eight percent of people living in stone and mud houses, along with 58% of those in houses made from baked brick and mortar, said their house became unlivable after the earthquakes. Seventy-nine percent of all houses completely destroyed, and 73% of those with significant damage, were made of stone and mud. This contrasts with other types of houses, especially those made with pillar structures or from stone and cement,

which were much less likely to be destroyed or seriously damaged (Figure 2.4).<sup>4</sup>

Highly impacted districts had far more people living in mud mortar structures than other areas. While the majority of people (58%) across the earthquake-affected districts lived in houses made of stone and mud, in high impact districts, 91% of people lived

in these houses. In high impact districts, 95% of houses completely destroyed, and 93% of those damaged to the extent they are unlivable, were made from stone and mud. The findings have important implications for strategies for reconstruction and the need to ‘build back better’ if the impacts of future disasters are to be limited.

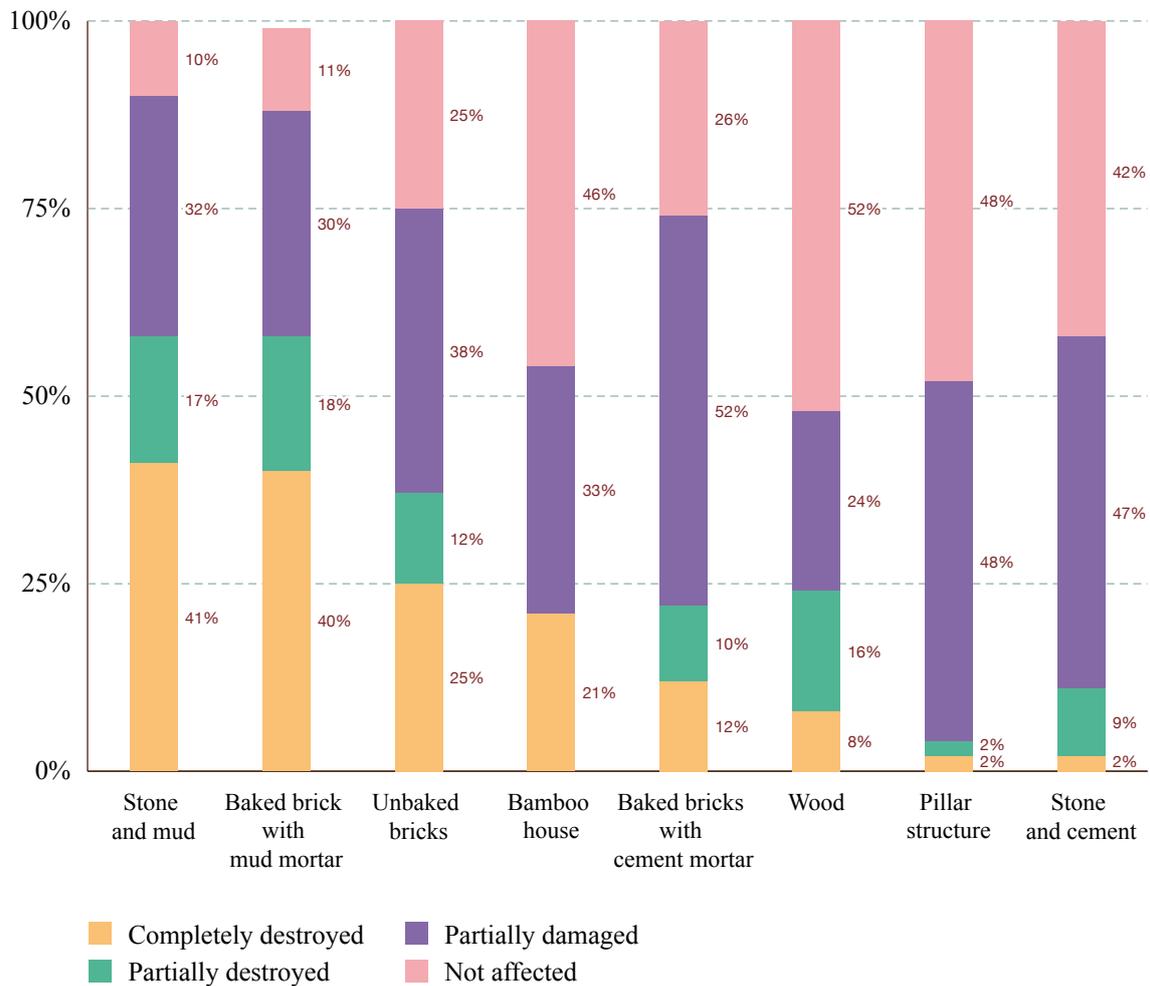


Figure 2.4: Level of damage – by type of housing structure

<sup>4</sup> In high impact districts, 25% of pillar structure houses were rendered unlivable. Only 4% of pillar structure houses had become unlivable in medium impact districts and 2% in low impact districts.

## 2.3 Whose houses were destroyed?

*The poor and farmers were the most likely to lose their houses.*

Households with an income of under NPR 20,000 per month were much more likely to report that their houses were substantially damaged than those who bring in more (Figure 2.5). Households with an income of NPR 2,500-9,999 were the most likely to have experienced such damage. Of those who earned less than NPR 2,500, fully 94% suffered some damage to their house. In contrast, 65% of those with income of NPR 20,000-39,999 had minor or no damage to their house and this rose to 71% for those with an income above NPR 40,000.

One reason for the differing impacts on income groups is that the rich tend to live in more robust structures. Sixty-one percent of those living in pillar structures had a monthly income of over NPR 20,000 and the figure was 41% for those living in baked brick and cement houses. The rich were also far less likely to live in rural areas, which were proportionately more affected.

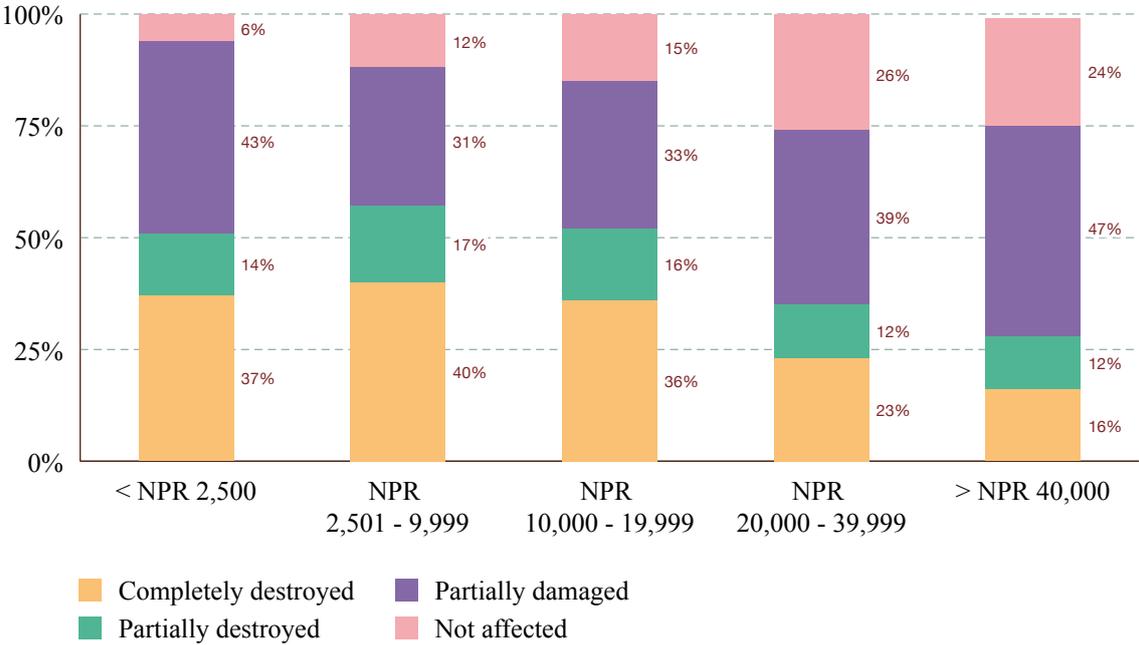


Figure 2.5: Level of destruction to homes – by monthly income

Those whose main profession was agriculture, or who were laborers, were the most likely to report serious damage to their house. Fifty-five percent of farmers across all areas could no longer live in their houses; the figure for laborers is 49%. In high impact districts, the houses of three-quarters of

those farming their own land, 80% of daily wage laborers, and 56% of those farming another's land had been completely destroyed. Those in business and housewives/househusbands were the least likely to report substantial damage to their houses.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.4 Where are people living?

*In high impact areas, most people are living in self-constructed temporary shelters.*

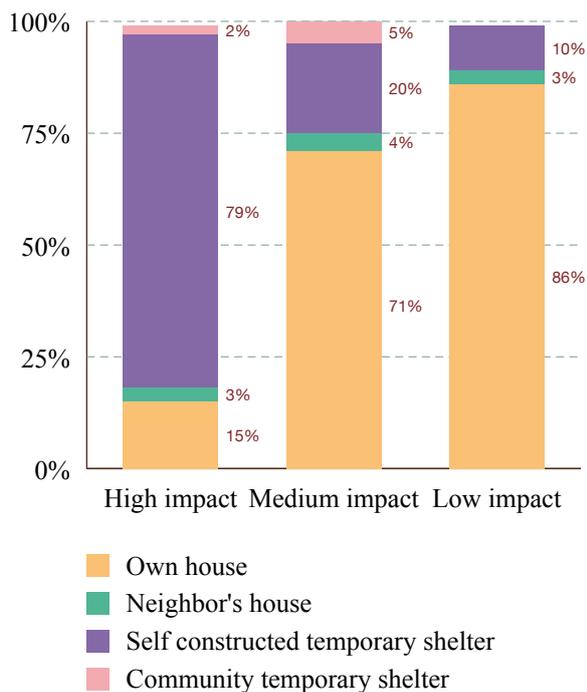


Figure 2.6: Where people were living (late June)

At the time the research was conducted, the vast majority of people in high impact districts were not living in their own houses (Figure 2.6). Most were in self-constructed temporary shelters on their own land. Some, in particular communities displaced by landslides or the risk of landslides, were living in community shelters on public land.

Richer people, however, were more likely to be living in their own house (80% with income of over NPR 40,000/month are in their own houses), and less likely to be in self-constructed shelters, than those who earn less. This was largely because the houses of richer people were more likely to have been made of sturdy materials.

<sup>5</sup> Although the houses of 42% of people who own their own businesses in high impact districts are reported as completely destroyed. Students are also more likely to report substantial damage to their house, but they only account for 2% of the sample.

## 2.5 Impacts on public infrastructure

*Schools were more affected than other public infrastructure.*

Schools were the most affected public facility. One-third of survey respondents said access to schools had worsened a lot because of the earthquake; another one-third said access had somewhat worsened. In high impact districts, these figures increase to 69% and 24%. Other forms of public infrastructure were less affected but were much more likely to be negatively affected in high impact districts (Figure 2.7).<sup>6</sup> Findings from the qualitative research reveal

that overall damages to public infrastructure were particularly high in some wards: in places, 45% of public infrastructure was reported fully destroyed, and 47% partially destroyed, leaving only 8% undamaged or facing just minor repairs. Damaged public infrastructure included VDC offices, health posts, schools, army barracks, post offices, irrigation channels, police posts, and phone towers.

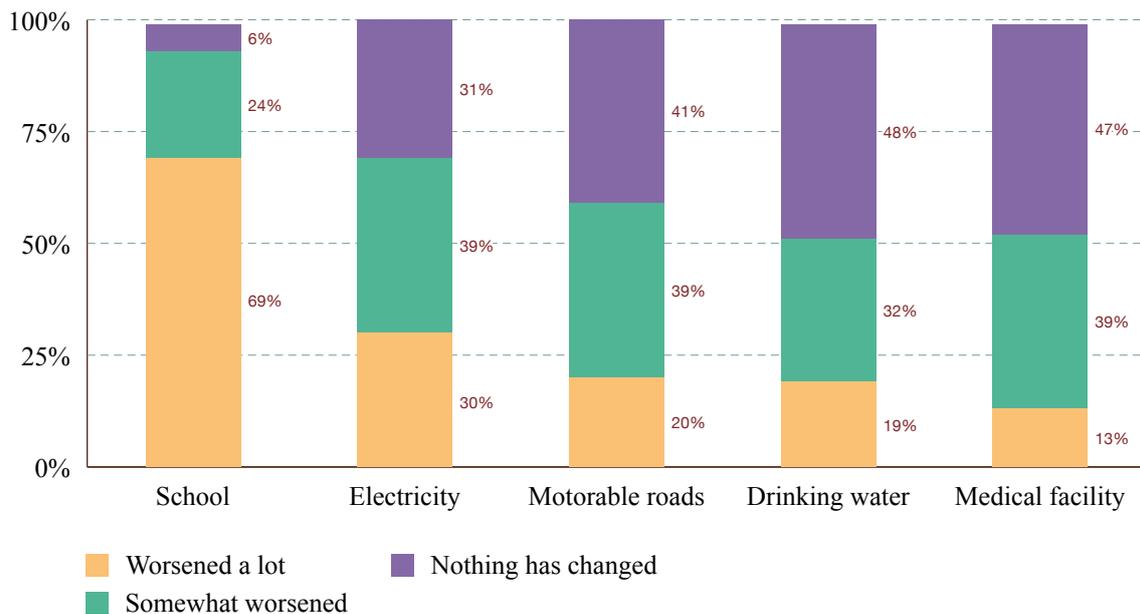


Figure 2.7: Extent to which public services/utilities have been affected in high impact districts

<sup>6</sup> Across all districts, 14% of people said access to electricity had worsened a lot due to the earthquakes, 31% that it had somewhat worsened, and 54% that access remained the same. For drinking water, the

figures are 13%, 22% and 65%. For motorable roads: 8%, 23% and 68%. For medical facilities: 7%, 21% and 69%.

## 2.6 Impacts on sources of income

Most of those in areas highly affected by the earthquakes are farmers. The majority of households own land but plots are generally small and only adequate for subsistence farming. Many farmers use draft animals to plough their land and the primary crops are rice, wheat, maize, and potato. Some households also farm cash crops and raise

livestock for sale. Annual yields from farming are generally insufficient to sustain a household for an entire year and the majority of households rely on additional sources of income. The most prevalent extra sources are daily and seasonal wage labor, remittances, and small businesses such as shops and restaurants.

*The earthquakes had the largest impact on the incomes of business people.*

Overall, the impact on farming was less severe than on other sources of income. The survey finds that around one-third of farmers said their incomes had been affected as did one-quarter of livestock farmers.

The incomes of businesspeople were much more affected. Those whose main source of income was remittances were the least likely to have seen their incomes affected—see discussion below (Figure 2.8).

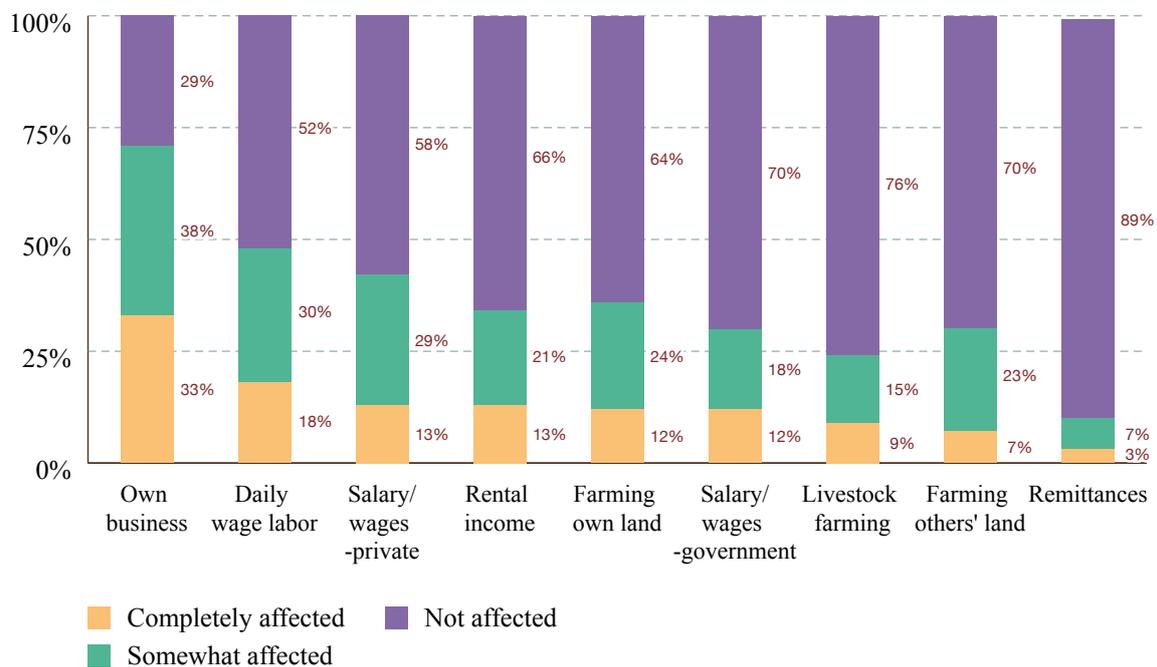


Figure 2.8: Impacts on source of income – by occupation

***The impact on farming was relatively low except where there had been, or were risks of, landslides.***

Farming continued in most places after the earthquakes. Farming was disrupted only in the short-term; many people were in shock or had to focus on constructing temporary shelters, collecting aid, and tending to the injured. But as the planting of crops such as rice and wheat had not yet begun at the time of the first quake, the impact on farming was relatively low; by mid-June, most farmers had resumed their work.

The impact was severe, however, in places where landslides swept away the terraces,

and cracked the fields and trails leading to them. Many people in those places reported that they would not return to their fields out of fear, at least until a formal landslide risk assessment is conducted. Further, many draft animals were killed or injured in the earthquakes, and people could not farm without them. The loss of other livestock was also a problem for farmers. This not only meant the loss of consumable goods like milk and meat but also income losses for those relying on the sale of livestock as a source of income.

***The impact on laborers was mixed.***

While the demand for manual labor to demolish buildings and clear rubble increased, and wages rose accordingly (tripling in some VDCs), construction projects were generally halted in earthquake-affected areas. For example, work on the Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower project in Dolakha was stalled, resulting in hundreds of laborers losing their jobs. Road construction was also interrupted in most places.

The demand for skilled labor declined with the exception of skills related to the

construction of temporary shelters. In Okhaldhunga, for example, laborers skilled in the construction of bamboo houses were in high demand.

In addition, the income of laborers in highly affected areas was interrupted due to the fact that they were simply unable to work because they had to take care of constructing their own shelters and salvaging assets from their destroyed homes, as well as claiming aid.

***There were large impacts on small businesses.***

Findings from the survey suggest that business owners were most likely to report that their income was seriously affected by the earthquake (see Figure 2.8). Business owners generally suffered less damage to their houses than many other occupational groups and many businesses were able to re-open soon after the earthquakes. But some business owners faced a complete loss of livelihood, in particular those without

alternative sources of income and without land of their own (see, for example, Box 2). In urban areas, many shop owners who had rented shops that were destroyed did not receive any compensation for losses to stocks and incomes and were unable to find alternative locations to re-open.

### **Box 2: A small business owner is hit hard by the earthquake**

“Unlike most of my neighbors, I do not own land for farming... It’s been almost a month already and no-one has assessed the extent of my damage. They take accounts of losses of crops and livestock, but why not the value of my business that I lost?” asked Shanti, a woman who owned a small cosmetics shop in a highly-affected VDC in Makwanpur. The house where she was renting rooms for her family and her shop collapsed when the earthquake hit. Recalling the moment, she still seemed in shock: “We were stranded, with nothing to eat, without any shelter in the rain, my kids were constantly crying. The image of the house coming down instantly still makes me sick, I never want to go back.”

Shanti lost her livelihood, the family’s sole source of income, during the earthquake. She initially took her children to a nearby town to stay with her

relatives. But when school resumed, she had to move back to the VDC and stay in a temporary shelter together with other displaced families as she was unable to afford living and educating her children in the city. “Both of them [the children] have been getting sick with diarrhea and coughs and colds. They are not very cheerful after the earthquake,” she said. “They did not want to come back.”

Unlike her neighbors whose livelihood is tied to the land where they cultivate cash crops such as off-season vegetables, Shanti was not opposed to being resettled elsewhere. “As long as the government can ensure us a proper shelter and respectful rehabilitation, I will not hesitate to move. But I need the assurance that I can restart my business. Alternatively, the government should provide us with income generating opportunities. I am not a farmer, I cannot farm.”

### ***Tourism was badly hit.***

The tourism industry was highly affected by the earthquakes as temples and trekking routes were damaged leading to job loss in areas of Dolakha and in Gorkha where tourism was a primary source of income.

The impact also affects associated industries. Handicraft producers in Sindhupalchok and producers of agricultural products targeted at tourists in Dolakha, for example, no longer had a market for their goods.

## 2.7 Coping strategies

*There were few reports of sales of assets and these were restricted to sale of livestock.*

Most of those who sold livestock did so because they were displaced by the earthquakes and could not take their livestock to temporary shelters. In one VDC in Sindhu-palchok, for example, roughly one-third of homes sold their livestock when they moved to temporary camps in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu. There were also some instances in

which households sold livestock because they needed the extra space to construct temporary shelters. In most areas, the price of livestock dropped after the earthquake, meaning that those who sold their livestock were forced to do so at significantly lower prices than what had been the market rate prior to the earthquakes.

*Borrowing increased, in particular amongst those highly impacted.*

The need for money was high in affected areas and borrowing increased after the earthquake. Borrowing was more common in high impact districts where 23% of survey respondents said they borrowed since the earthquake, compared to 12% in medium impact and 7% in low impact districts. People who suffered higher levels of housing damage tended to borrow money more than people whose houses had less or no damage (Figure 2.9).

Generally, however, people said that while they would have to borrow money in the near future they preferred to wait for more clarity on government assistance and compensation schemes, as well as special interest rates for earthquake victims, before taking out loans. Only those without enough land and alternative resources to fall back on already had to borrow larger sums. Often this was from moneylenders and at high interest rates, suggesting the potential for debt traps affecting lower income groups. Dalit families in Okhaldhunga, for example, borrowed money at high interest rates but expected to receive compensation from the government that would allow them to repay

the loans (see Box 4 below). Borrowed money was mostly used for emergency shelters or to begin repairing or rebuilding homes.

People were most likely to borrow from relatives; where they borrowed from them, they also borrowed the largest sums of money (NPR 103,888 on average). Neighbors were another common source of lending, but people borrowed less from them (NPR 58,904). The findings show the importance of family and other local networks as safety nets in periods of distress.

Banks, on average, provided the highest amount of lending and at lower rates than other lenders but very few people (only 0.4% of all survey respondents) had borrowed from them. Moneylenders, the second most popular source of credit, charged the highest interest rates at 2.26% per month. This suggests that moneylenders were expending credit to a larger range of people, but at a price. Low caste people who borrowed money were twice as likely to borrow from moneylenders.

Farmers and wage laborers were most

likely to have borrowed money since the earthquake (Figure 2.10). The likelihood of borrowing was consistent for all income groups except for the richest—those with pre-earthquake expenditures of over NPR 60,000/month—who were much less likely

to say they had borrowed since the earthquake. Unsurprisingly, reported borrowing was more likely where people’s income had been affected by the earthquake, for most sources of income except for people who owned businesses.

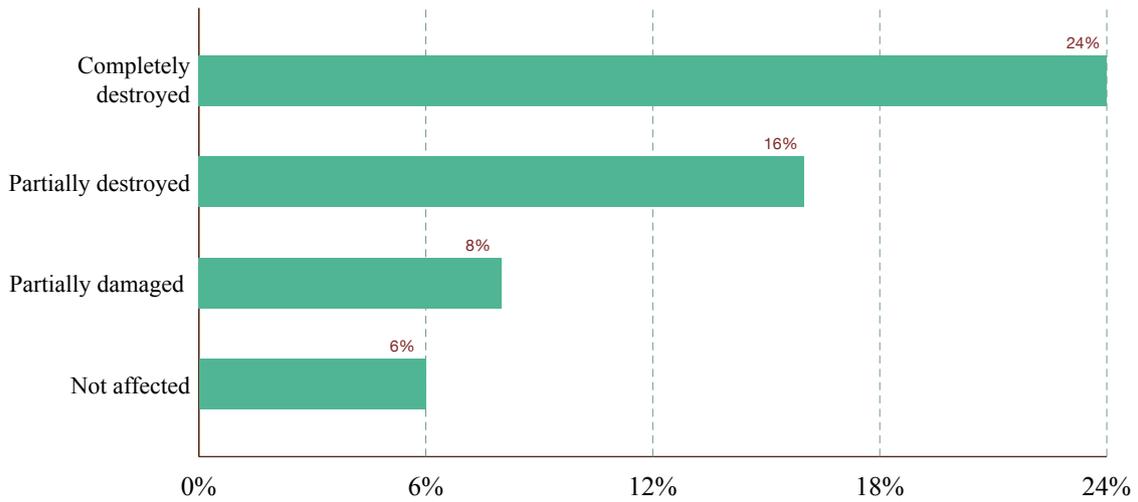


Figure 2.9: Borrowing after the earthquake – by damage to houses

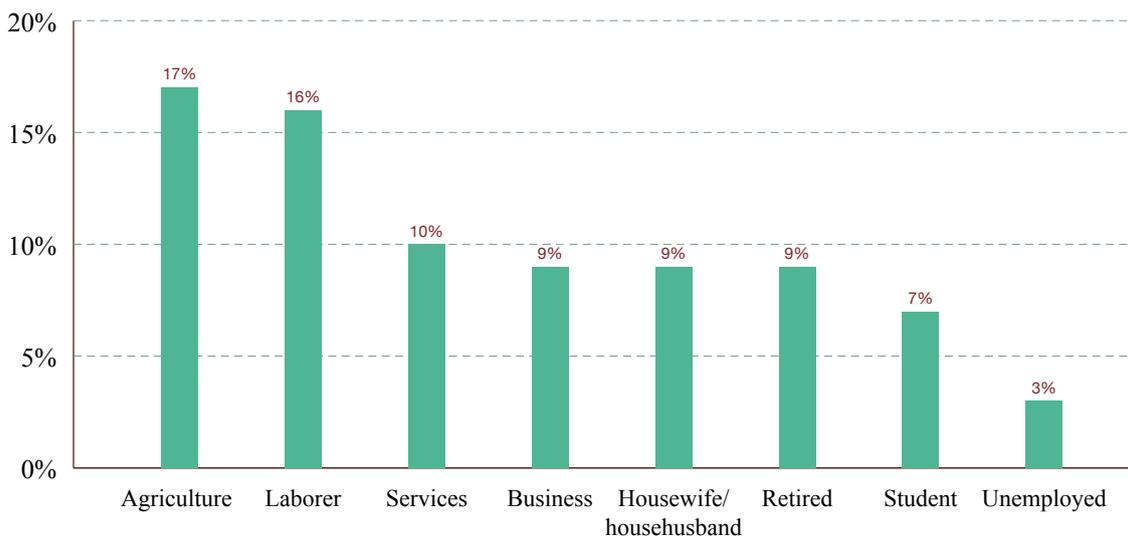


Figure 2.10: Those who borrowed money – by occupation

***Remittances continued; there was little new labor migration in the two months following the earthquake.***

Many affected households reported relying on remittances as a source of income—for some remittances was an additional source of income, for others it was crucial to meet basic needs. Of the 36 wards where qualitative fieldwork was conducted, remittances were the largest source of income for most people in three wards, for many in nine, for some or a few in 23.

The flow of remittances was for the most part uninterrupted after the earthquake, apart from during the days immediately following the earthquake, largely due to power shortages and interruptions to means of communication. Only 10% of households whose primary source of income was remittances said that their income was affected (Figure 2.8 above).

In at least some highly affected areas, the volume of remittances increased after

the earthquakes. At the Charikot branch of the IME bank in Dolakha, the total amount of remittances sent through the bank between 14 and 24 April was NPR 2,713,737. Between 4 May, when the bank re-opened, and 12 May, when the second major earthquake struck, the total amount jumped to NPR 10,362,688. Between 18 May, when the bank reopened again, and 29 May, the total amount transferred was NPR 8,414,007.

Nevertheless, remittance money may not be enough for households to bear the heavy burden of having to rebuild their homes or, in some cases, resettle. Some households indicated that they may need to send more family members to work abroad in the future, especially if they would have to pay for the reconstruction of their homes themselves.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

## 3. THE AID EFFORT

### 3.1 The coordination of relief distribution

*Aid distribution was initially chaotic leading to tensions.*

Patterns of aid delivery were vastly different in the initial weeks after the first earthquake and the period that followed. Early on, aid was often delayed and uneven, as multiple aid providers acted without the coordination needed to effectively target and distribute relief. Providers often focused their distribution on accessible areas along highways and intact roads. The exception was security forces, who mobilized quickly across affected areas to assist with relief delivery, to protect aid providers, and to secure the transportation and storage of aid, and facilitate distribution. The initial chaos led to confusion and tensions about what kinds and volumes of aid were being distributed and which areas were receiving it or missing out.

There were a number of reasons why early responses were so chaotic. Districts were not adequately prepared to respond to the impacts of a major natural disaster. They had not stored sufficient emergency supplies and government disaster response committees were not functional. Government directives

to facilitate efficient coordination were delayed and unclear. In many places, district and VDC officials were absent at the time of the earthquake. And mountainous terrain made accessing remote areas difficult. The second earthquake of 12 May made responses even more difficult.

***After the formalization of government mechanisms, relief coordination vastly improved.***

After the initial difficulties of the first few weeks, however, government coordination and distribution mechanisms were formalized (Figure 3.1). This improved coordination and the delivery of aid. Relief committees were established at the district and VDC/municipality levels to centralize and redistribute incoming aid, both that provided by government and by non-governmental

sources. Direct distribution of assistance to people outside of these channels was prohibited. This so-called ‘one door’ policy faced much criticism from aid providers who preferred to distribute directly. Two months on from the first quake, some aid providers continued to bypass these mechanisms. However, generally these mechanisms were used and they performed well.

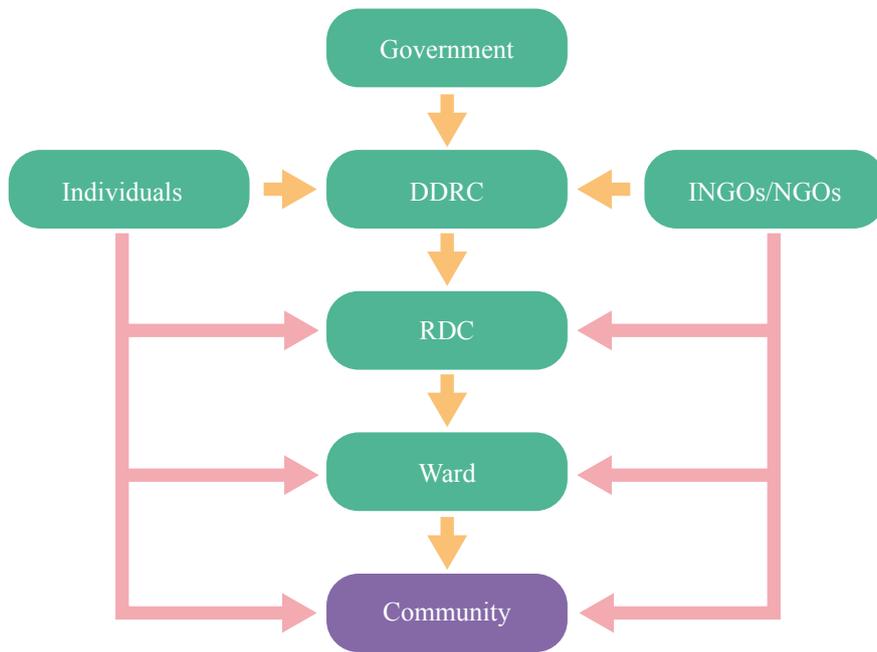


Figure 3.1: Mechanism of government relief coordination

**District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs)** are the key coordinating body for relief at the sub-national level, authorized to direct the distribution of relief across VDCs under their jurisdiction.<sup>7</sup> Organizations who wanted to deliver relief in a district were required to register with the DDRC, which told them where they could work. Cooperation between the Nepal government and humanitarian organizations was organized through parallel thematic ‘clusters’.<sup>8</sup>

**VDC relief distribution committees (RDCs)** are the key institutional mechanism coordinating relief below the district level. RDCs registered incoming aid at the VDC level, took decisions on how it was to be distributed, and facilitated distribution to affected households or individuals—mostly in close collaboration with ward-level subcommittees. The RDCs closely resembled All Party Mechanisms (APMs), with political parties highly active in and dominating the decisions of the committees.<sup>9</sup> In many places, the committees also included schoolteachers, Social Mobilizers and Ward Citizen Forum (WCF) coordinators, respected elders, or selected ward representatives. The formation and decision-making processes of RDCs varied widely and were not always transparent.

***In general, government coordination mechanisms at the district level and below performed well.***

In many of the VDCs visited, RDCs acted quickly after the earthquake, coordinating rapid impact assessments to identify areas and households that most needed assistance and communicating needs for assistance to the district level and outside donors.

Equipped with detailed local information on damages and needs, and through their manifold informal ties with the community, RDCs generally succeeded in distributing relief equally if not always equitably, and avoiding local tensions and political

<sup>7</sup> The institution of the DDRC is established in the Natural Calamities (Relief) Act 1982. The Local Governance Act 1999 encourages district and VDC authorities to assume primary responsibility for relief after natural disasters, without specifying working modalities.

<sup>8</sup> The cluster approach had been in practice since the Koshi river flood in September 2008. It was officially endorsed by the Government of Nepal in 2009 becoming a cornerstone of the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Management of that year. The Guidance Note on Disaster Preparedness and Response Planning issued by the Disaster Management Section of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) outlines the cooperation between the government and humanitarian organizations through clusters:

[http://www.moha.gov.np/uploads/publications/file/Guidance%20Note%202011%20for%20Preparing%20Disaster%20Preparedness%20&%20Response%20Plan\\_English\\_20110915060310.pdf](http://www.moha.gov.np/uploads/publications/file/Guidance%20Note%202011%20for%20Preparing%20Disaster%20Preparedness%20&%20Response%20Plan_English_20110915060310.pdf)

See also <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal> for information on clusters operating to coordinate the response for various sectors after the 2015 earthquakes.

<sup>9</sup> APMs were officially abolished in 2012 but have since continued to operate informally in most places. See The Carter Center (2014). Local Governance in Nepal: Participation and Perception. 28 February. <http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/pr/nepal-022814-local-governance.pdf>

infighting. The committees played a key role in mediating between affected populations, the district administration, and humanitarian organizations.

RDCs put a strong emphasis on distributing incoming relief to all affected households equally. This strengthened social cohesion, preventing tensions and disputes. Efforts were made by some RDCs to target aid to those most in need, or groups with less monetary or social resources to cope on their own, such as the marginalized, Dalits, the poor, old people, or single women. This tended to occur where the volume of relief was insufficient to provide support to all.

RDCs also played an important role in bringing aid to remote wards. People from

inaccessible settlements faced greater difficulties accessing and transporting their share of relief from distribution points to their homes. RDCs often addressed this issue by arranging transportation to remote areas. However, logistical challenges remained. Local bodies often struggled to finance transportation costs especially for larger and heavier relief packages such as corrugated iron sheets—likely a reason why much of the LGCDP grant to VDCs and municipalities was spent on transportation.<sup>10</sup> In some places, those settlements that received enough aid decided to divert their share to more remote and more highly affected wards that had received less. Such redistribution was not possible where donors distributed directly to affected households, bypassing coordination mechanisms.

***There were some limitations to government coordination mechanisms related to a lack of transparency and accountability to victims.***

The RDCs generally performed well, ensuring those in need received assistance and that tensions related to aid distribution were minimized. But they also had weaknesses.

RDCs and their sub-committees lack independent and systematic procedures to register and respond to requests for information or complaints. Informal ties do not work well for those excluded from local power networks. In some cases, leaders who represent smaller communities felt that they were excluded from observing or participating in VDC committee meetings. Citizen participation in relief distribution committees was marginal at best. Even where Ward Citizen Forums were involved in the committees, their role was rarely instrumental with decision-making power resting with political parties.

Decision-making processes at the VDC

level were often non-transparent. People generally knew what and how much they received but not who provided and how much had arrived in the VDC. While some VDC Secretaries kept records on all aid received and how it was distributed, others were less assiduous, or reluctant to provide residents access.

<sup>10</sup> The government provided cash assistance to earthquake affected VDCs and municipalities under the LGCDP grant immediately after the 25 April earthquake. Immediate needs of the area, for example food, temporary shelter, or medical assistance were to be identified and the funds spent accordingly within one month after receipt. The ways in which this grant was spent, however, varied widely and was not transparent, rarely following the guidelines on timeline and decision-making. In many places, a large share of the grant was spent on the transportation of relief to the VDC or to more remote wards within the VDC as transport costs had increased significantly in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

## 3.2 What aid people received

### *The government was seen by victims as being the largest provider of aid.*

People saw the government as the primary provider of every type of aid. This was due to the ‘one door’ policy, where all aid materials were channeled through government institutions, perhaps creating the perception that such aid was provided by the government. This was the case in both high and medium impact districts; findings do not

substantially vary by remoteness or gender. International NGOs were also frequently cited as providing aid such as kitchen utensils, medical assistance, corrugated iron sheets and sanitary packages. Other sources included local NGOs and individuals. Political parties and Nepal’s security agencies were rarely cited as aid providers.

### *Aid in the first two months after the earthquakes largely focused on emergency relief.*

The monsoon rains increased the need for fast relief—particularly in the form of emergency shelter, the priority of most aid providers—and delayed other forms of assistance.

The primary relief materials distributed across affected areas, including in medium and low impact areas, were emergency shelter and food. Tarps were the most common form of aid received as of June 2015.

Ninety-five percent of respondents in high impact districts said they had received tarps. Far fewer received corrugated iron sheets, which provide more sturdy shelter (Figure 3.2).<sup>11</sup> Food was also widely provided, reaching 79% of households in high impact districts. Other forms of assistance were less frequent.

determine, but findings from the qualitative research suggest that emergency relief—such as tarps and food—was sufficient for the immediate period.<sup>12</sup> Volumes of food aid were initially small and targeted at displaced households or those whose houses had fully collapsed; but as volumes of aid increased over time, food was increasingly distributed evenly to all households.

The exact amounts of aid received at the ward and household level were difficult to

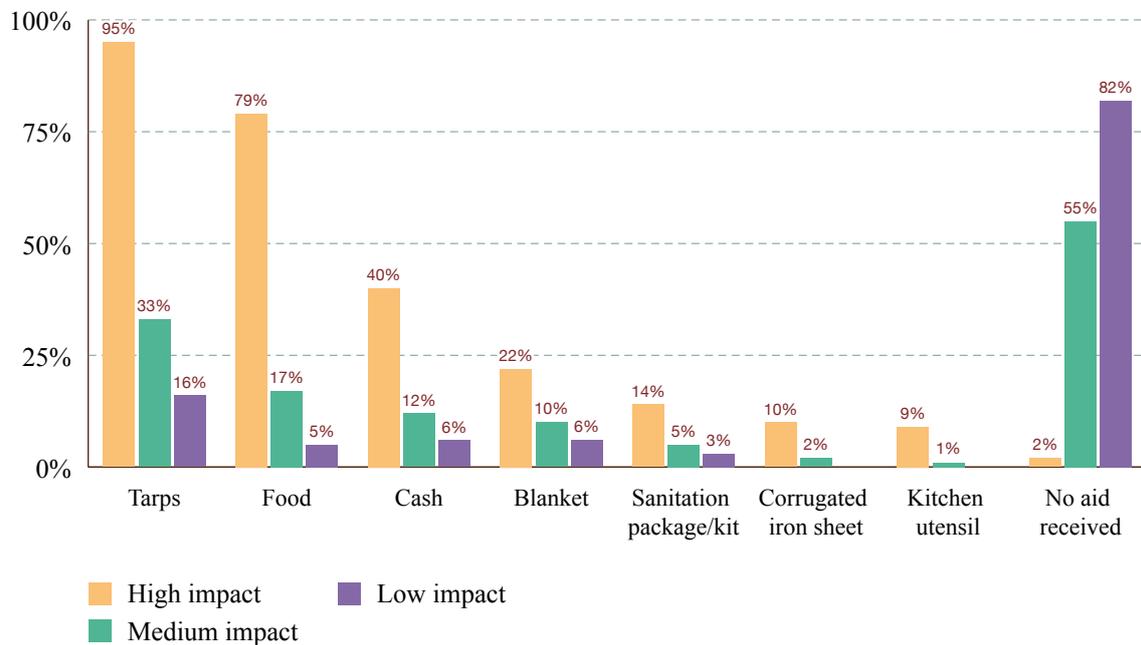


Figure 3.2: Aid received – by district earthquake impact

<sup>11</sup> However, findings from the qualitative field research show that many more people were making use of corrugated iron sheets. This is because they used cash distributed by the government and others to purchase sheets. Some also used sheets that they recovered from the rubble of their houses.

sufficient information to determine volumes of aid distributed at the ward and household level. Even though the government tried to centralize, control and coordinate aid distribution, individuals and ad hoc volunteer groups often circumvented government channels and did not report their distribution, especially in the early days of the relief. As a result, records from this time were particularly inconsistent.

<sup>12</sup> Official records often varied from one VDC to another in the time period they cover and in the level of details. They also did not always include

***Cash has gone out but has reached fewer people than expected and is at lower levels than government policies state.***

Government policy was to provide cash to those affected by the earthquake: NPR 30,000 for families of the deceased to cover funeral costs; NPR 15,000 for households whose homes were classified as ‘fully damaged’ to cover costs for emergency shelters; and NPR 3,000 for households whose homes were classified as ‘partially damaged’.

While some cash did flow to those in need, many who were entitled to cash report not having received it (Figure 3.3). We found levels of cash distribution that fall slightly short for those with destroyed houses and far short for those who had a family member who died. The former reported receiving on average NPR 11,720; the latter, NPR 9,950.<sup>13</sup>

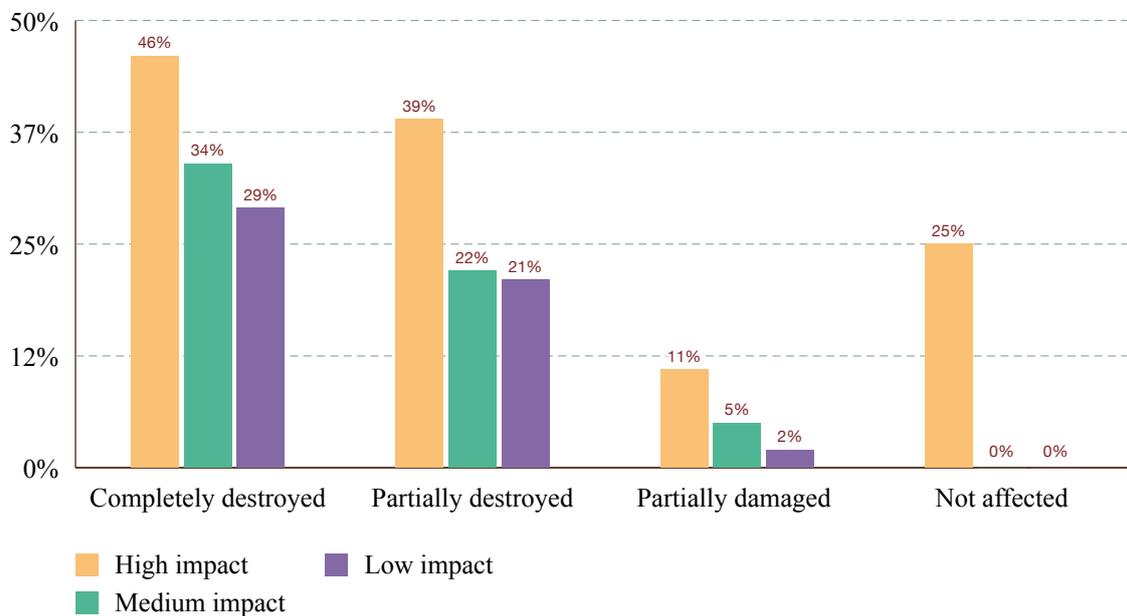


Figure 3.3: Proportion receiving cash – by damage to houses and district earthquake impact

<sup>13</sup> These amounts are the average for those who report receiving cash.

*There were vast differences across districts in the proportion of people reporting receiving cash.*

Amongst high impact districts, for example, they got cash, while the figure was only 2% of survey respondents in Nuwakot said in Sindhupalchok (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Proportion of people receiving cash – by district

District earthquake impact	District	Received cash
High	Nuwakot	91%
	Dhading	58%
	Gorkha	47%
	Solukhumbu	29%
	Ramechhap	10%
	Sindhupalchok	2%
Medium	Bhaktapur	23%
	Manang	14%
	Okhaldungha	10%
	Kathmandu	6%
	Lamjung	2%
Low	Khotang	13%
	Syangja	6%
	Dang	0%

*The most common reason for the delayed and partial distribution of government cash grants were difficulties in the process of identifying beneficiaries.*

These related to a lack of updated and detailed data on the population, difficulties in determining what constitutes a household (the target unit for cash grants), and highly contested government damage assessments that were used as basis for determining

beneficiaries. In several VDCs, locals raised protests against damage assessments and the lists used to identify beneficiaries. As a result, VDC officials often had to delay or interrupt distribution (see Box 3 below).



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

Distribution of government cash grants was inconsistent across districts because requirements for accessing grants differed. Districts had different rules for what documents had to be submitted. In low impact districts, smaller amounts were distributed.<sup>14</sup> Logistical and security challenges also hampered the distribution of cash grants. Some

local officials preferred to distribute from the district headquarters or central relief distribution points rather than VDC offices citing security concerns related to traveling to remote places with large sums of money. This increased people's difficulties in accessing cash grants.

### 3.3 Problems with targeting

***There is evidence of substantial geographic mistargeting: both inclusion and exclusion errors. Many in highly impacted wards in medium impact districts missed out.***

Ninety-eight percent of people in high impact district reported receiving aid (see Figure 3.2 above). As such, many people in low and medium impact wards in high impact districts received aid they may not

have needed. Figure 3.4 shows who reported having received tarps by district impact. Seventy-five percent of people in high impact districts who said their house was not affected by the earthquake reported that they had received tarps. In contrast, around one-third of people who experienced substantial damage to their houses in medium and low impact districts reported not having received tarps.

<sup>14</sup> In Syangja, the local government distributed only NPR 5,000 instead of 15,000 to those whose houses were listed as 'fully damaged'.

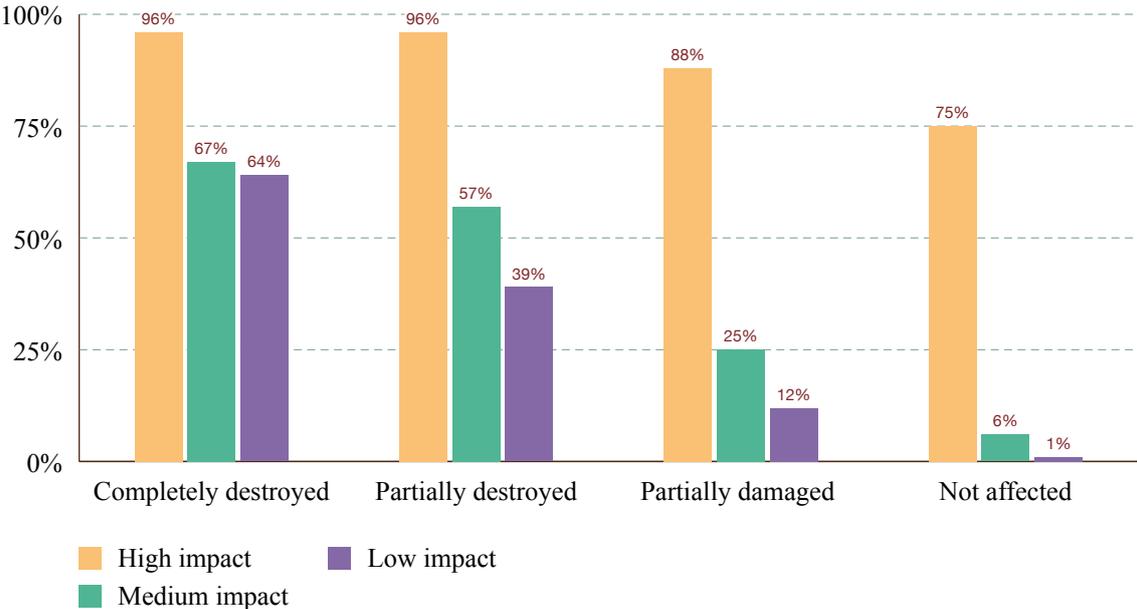


Figure 3.4: Proportion receiving tarps – by damage to houses and district earthquake impact

Those living in highly affected wards in medium impact districts were also less likely to receive assistance than those in low impact wards in higher impact districts. Only 61% of people in high impact wards in

medium impact districts had received tarps, compared to 96% of people in low impact wards (where less than one-third of houses were uninhabitable) (Table 3.2).<sup>15</sup>

Table 3.2: Proportion receiving tarps – by district and ward level earthquake impact

District impact	Ward impact		
	High	Medium	Low
High	96%	89%	96%
Medium	61%	59%	24%
Low	-	37%	15%

<sup>15</sup> There are no high impact wards in low impacts districts in the survey sample.

Corrugated iron sheet distribution and food assistance followed the same pattern. Among those whose house was completely

destroyed, 14% in medium impact districts and 36% in low impacts districts reported that they had received no aid of any type.

***The government classification of damage at the district level seemed to greatly influence the number of organizations that provided aid and the attention a district received.***

In Sindhupalchok, for example, over 100 NGOs and INGOs were registered while few donors visited Dolakha before the district was reclassified as high impact/severely hit after the second earthquake on 12 May. The lack of publicly available official data on VDC and ward impacts made targeting at these levels difficult, especially for non-gov-

ernment actors. This is likely a key reason why highly affected wards in lesser-impacted districts received less aid. The insufficient volumes of aid in medium and lower impact districts necessitated the prioritization of those most in need. Dissatisfaction with aid received and distribution mechanisms was higher in these districts.

## 3.4 Accessibility and aid distribution

***Aid reached remote areas.***

According to survey findings, aid was even more likely to have been received in remote areas, including more remote ones, than in accessible areas (Figure 3.5). Amongst those whose houses were destroyed or

unlivable, people in wards far from the district headquarters were at least as likely to receive assistance as those who lived closer (Figure 3.6).<sup>16</sup>

***It took time, however, for aid to reach more remote areas.***

The qualitative research found that in the first weeks after the earthquake, settlements along roads received much more assistance. Both individual donors (including politicians, businessmen and volunteers) and NGOs and INGOs tended to conduct their relief efforts in accessible areas and to distribute aid directly, bypassing government relief coordination mechanisms. As the role

of individual donors declined, and aid coordination was institutionalized, the reach of relief expanded.

<sup>16</sup> As noted earlier, we included some very remote wards in the survey. But it was not possible to reach some of the most remote wards sampled. As such, we are not able to report in conditions in those areas.

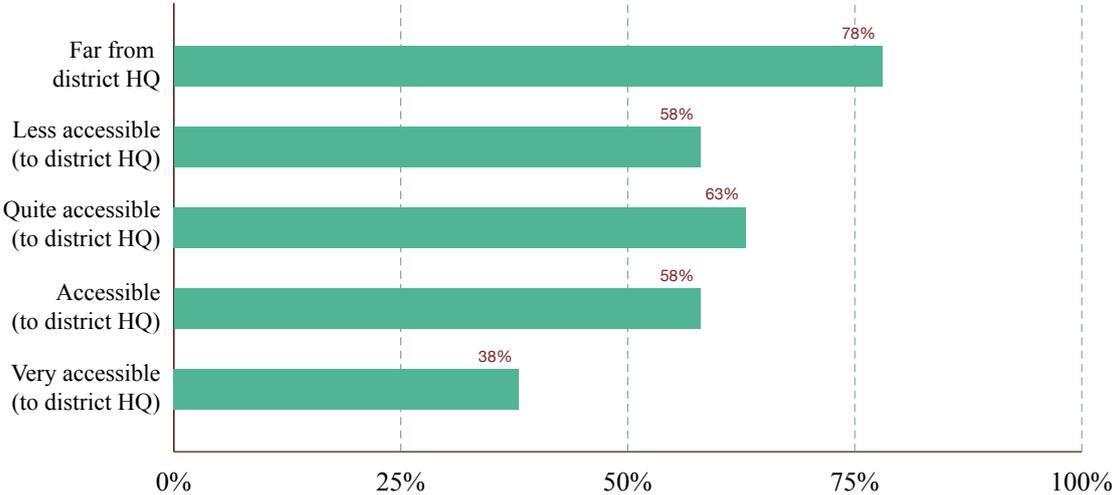


Figure 3.5: Proportion receiving aid – by ward accessibility

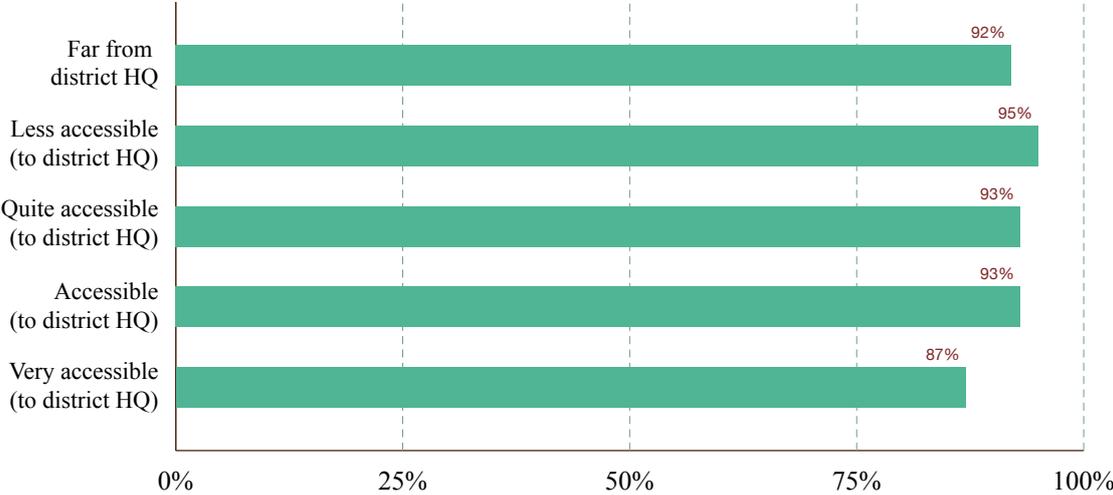


Figure 3.6: Proportion receiving aid – by ward accessibility (those with major housing damage)

### 3.5 Satisfaction with aid providers

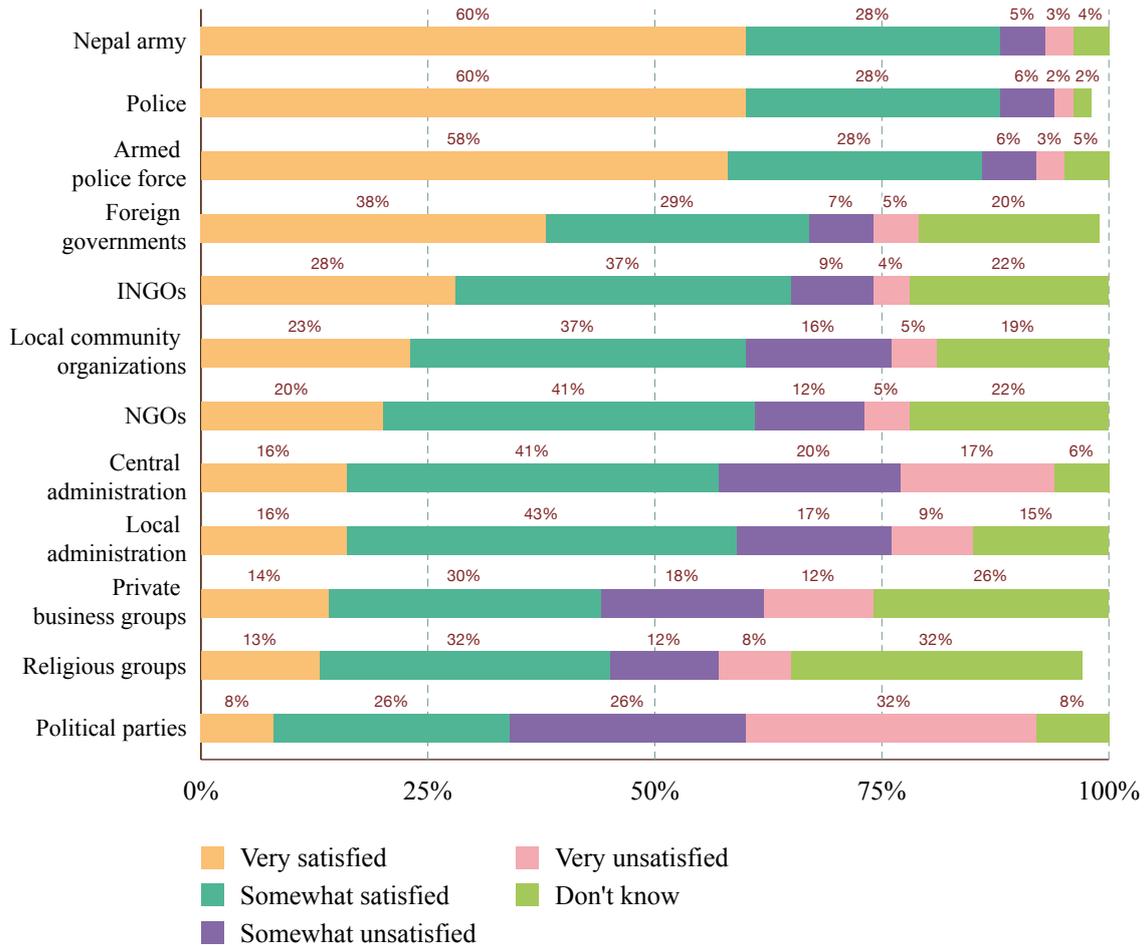


Figure 3.7: Satisfaction with response of different institutions<sup>17</sup>

**Satisfaction with aid providers was uneven.**

People were most satisfied with the response of Nepal’s security forces. Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents were either very or somewhat satisfied with the Nepal army and police, and 86% with the armed police force (Figure 3.7). Given that these institutions were rarely cited as being

aid providers, this was likely due to their quick response in rescue operations and

<sup>17</sup> Note that for this and the following graphs missing responses are those who did not answer the question or did not know how to answer.

the clearing of rubble and roads. Levels of satisfaction with the civilian branches of the state were much lower, although a majority still had favorable views of each.

Satisfaction with international groups was mixed. Sixty-five percent of respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with the responses of INGOs and 67% felt the same

about foreign governments. Yet over one-fifth of respondents said they were very unsatisfied with each. Reactions to the role of political parties were generally unfavorable with only one-third saying they had played a positive role and two-fifths that their response had been unsatisfactory. The responses of private businesses and of religious groups were deemed poor by many.

***There were mixed opinions on how well local distribution mechanisms functioned.***

The survey finds divided views among people on whether VDC/municipality officials distributed aid fairly. Overall, 55% felt distribution had been fair while 36% disagreed.

Satisfaction was higher in high impact districts (71% favorable) than in medium and low impact ones (49% and 46%, respectively) – Figure 3.8. This was because

aid in these districts was mostly distributed equally to all households—made possible by higher volumes of incoming aid and near uniform levels of destruction in many high impact districts. In medium and low impact districts, where households had to be prioritized based on the level of impact and socio-economic status, dissatisfaction and complaints about distribution mechanisms were more common.

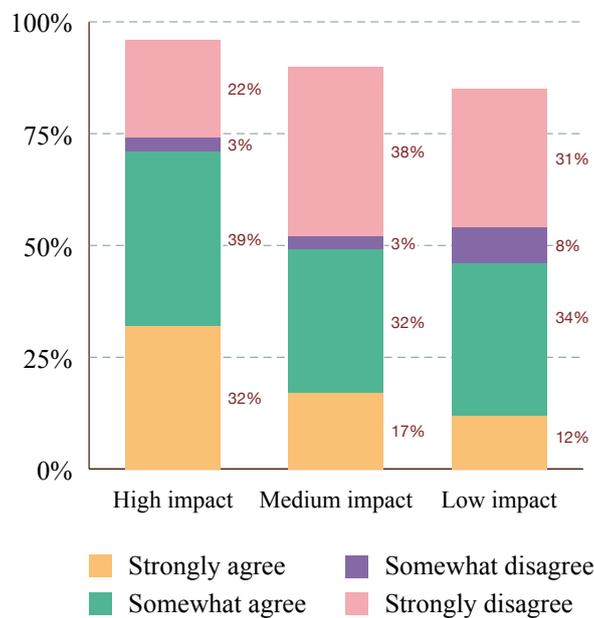


Figure 3.8: Agreement that aid is being distributed by VDCs/municipalities fairly

***Dissatisfaction over selection of beneficiaries for government compensation was high and caused tensions.***

Worries about the future and how to rebuild without adequate assistance were common and linked to the inconsistent selection of beneficiaries for government compensation and a lack of clarity on future assistance schemes. As such, dissatisfaction was mostly

directed at the government, in particular higher levels of government; satisfaction with local government officials was higher, due to their fast response in assessing damages and coordinating, monitoring and distributing aid (see Box 3).

**Box 3: Government damage assessments**

Government assessments of damages to houses have been used to categorize impact levels, target aid, and create beneficiary lists of those entitled to government compensation. These damage assessments, however, have been very contentious. Levels of dissatisfaction over assessments and beneficiary lists were high; complaints were raised by VDC officials, local leaders, and citizens alike, and there were protests and demands for reassessments in many places. This delayed the distribution of cash grants. As compensation packages increase during the reconstruction phase, protests and conflicts related to damage assessments are likely to spread.

Complaints related to two issues: (i) the fact that assessments were conducted in multiple rounds and haphazardly leading to inconsistencies; and (ii) the fact that the categories used were considered problematic, or at least inadequate.

Damage assessments were conducted inconsistently, often in multiple

rounds. Most VDC-level relief committees conducted assessments within days of the earthquake, often at their own initiative. Information was fed up to the district level but was also used to allocate resources locally. In parallel, district-wide rounds of assessments were carried out by government technical teams, consisting of engineers from the district administration as well as local stakeholders such as the VDC Secretary or Assistant, political party leaders, or ward representatives. These multiple assessments led to conflicting data with district assessments much more likely to reduce the numbers of damaged houses. There was a lack of clarity at the local level over which of the various assessments should be used to create beneficiary lists. In addition, follow-up assessments were not undertaken everywhere after the second earthquake on 12 May, which caused considerable further damage.

The ways in which both the local and district assessment teams conducted assessments varied widely. Some early

assessments used different criteria, for example taking into account the fact that economically disadvantaged or otherwise marginalized groups would have more pronounced needs. In some places, assessment teams are seen as having worked diligently, while in others there are reports of the preferential treatment of some households, political interference, or the teams relying on indirect reports and imprecise figures. Complaints and allegations of political interference were more pronounced in medium impact districts, likely due to the fact that there were fewer discrepancies in high impact districts where nearly all houses were destroyed and classified equally.

Assessment teams categorized houses as ‘fully damaged’, ‘partially damaged’, or ‘normal’ but the ways in which these categories were interpreted and applied varied. Further, the categories themselves were seen by many as flawed. These categories did not take account of the fact that some houses are not fully collapsed but are uninhabitable and have to be rebuilt. Those whose houses were uninhabitable but classified as ‘partially damaged’ were not entitled to the same benefits as those whose houses were

labeled ‘fully damaged’. This led to higher levels of dissatisfaction among owners of ‘partially damaged’ houses.

The local administration in some districts was found to make efforts to address such complaints. The problem of partially damaged but uninhabitable houses was generally recognized. In at least one district, all damaged mud-stone houses were labeled ‘fully damaged’ as houses of this type cannot be easily repaired and generally need to be torn down and rebuilt. In other districts, the administration made it possible for people to apply for reassessment of their houses or to submit evidence of having fully demolished their uninhabitable house, which would grant them reclassification to ‘fully damaged’. Nevertheless, there seemed to be no larger systematic efforts at addressing widespread complaints and correcting inconsistencies in data on damages to houses.

By leading to ineffective planning, protests, and delayed distribution of relief, flawed assessments ultimately left earthquake victims uncertain about what they will receive when and under what conditions, undermining their ability to effectively plan their own steps towards recovery.

## 3.6 Remaining needs

*Two months on from the earthquake, affected populations still had many immediate needs. People said they need corrugated iron sheets and cash.*

In high impact districts, only 2% of the population stated that they do not require any further assistance, whereas almost half of those in medium and lower impact districts said they do not immediately require assistance.

The type of needs also varied by the level of earthquake damage (Table 3.3). In high impact districts, the most immediate need

identified by respondents at the time the survey was conducted was corrugated iron sheets, with 80% of respondents saying it was one of their three top priorities. While most people in high impact districts had received tarps, only 10% had directly received corrugated iron sheets.<sup>18</sup> Ten percent of people said they still needed these but, two months on from the quake, they now prioritized more sturdy building materials.

Table 3.3: Immediate needs (top three needs) – by district earthquake impact and rural/urban

	All affected districts	District earthquake impact			Ward	
		High	Medium	Low	Rural	Urban
Cash	47%	66%	39%	42%	54%	27%
Corrugated iron sheets	40%	80%	30%	14%	49%	15%
Rice, wheat, maize	30%	58%	21%	17%	33%	20%
Tarps	13%	10%	13%	18%	15%	8%
Tent	7%	9%	6%	5%	7%	7%
Clean drinking water	6%	12%	4%	5%	7%	6%
Medical aid	6%	8%	4%	6%	6%	4%
Farm implements	5%	6%	4%	8%	6%	3%
Readymade food (noodles, biscuits, etc.)	5%	11%	2%	4%	6%	2%
Sugar, salt, oil, spices	5%	11%	3%	2%	5%	3%
<i>No need for relief</i>	34%	2%	46%	46%	25%	58%

<sup>18</sup> Many may have used cash given as aid to buy sheets.

*Cash will become even more important over time.*

Eighty percent of people in high impact districts said cash was required in the next three months compared to 48% who said corrugated iron sheets were required and 52% who stated they needed food staples (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Needs in the next three months – by district earthquake impact and rural/urban

	All affected districts	Earthquake impact			Ward	
		High	Medium	Low	Rural	Urban
Cash	46%	80%	36%	30%	54%	26%
Corrugated iron sheets	26%	48%	19%	15%	31%	10%
Rice, wheat, maize	25%	52%	15%	16%	30%	14%
Farm implements	10%	16%	5%	15%	12%	5%
Medical aid	9%	14%	5%	11%	10%	4%
Sugar, salt, oil, spices	7%	17%	4%	2%	8%	4%
Clean drinking water	7%	10%	6%	5%	6%	8%
Tarps	6%	6%	7%	5%	7%	5%
Clean water for household purposes	5%	6%	3%	7%	6%	2%
<i>No need for relief</i>	40%	4%	54%	51%	31%	63%



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

## 4. POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP

### 4.1 Political party activities

*There were no significant changes to the roles of political parties and their leaders at the local level since the earthquake.*

Pre-existing structures of local governance, such as the formally disbanded but still functional All Party Mechanisms (APMs), involve a large role for political parties. These same structures were used to coordinate relief distribution. Indeed, the earthquake, and subsequent formation of relief committees, provided an opportunity for political parties to become more relevant and decisive locally. Parties were highly active in DDRCs as well as the local RDCs and often had significant decision-making authority. In most VDC and ward committees, political parties were assigned leadership positions based on their performance during the 2013 Constituent Assembly elections. The three major

political parties—Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and UCPN(M)—were the most active. Relations between political parties and local administrations were generally good after the earthquake and coordination had reportedly even improved in many places.

Despite the absence of local elections, the local networks of political parties run deep and remained intact after the earthquake. Local party leaders continue to require support and to be an essential link between high levels of government and communities. In several places, local leaders took the lead in coordinating the construction of

community shelters, in assisting the distribution of relief to affected communities and in lobbying on their behalf where dissatisfaction was high. It is therefore not surprising that many people assessed the role of local leaders positively. Yet, there were also clear limitations to the accountability of local leaders. While the absence of elections found some redress through leaders' strong links with communities, the informal relations these rest on are less likely to work effectively for those who are excluded from local power networks on the basis of caste, ethnicity, gender, or class.

***There was little politicization of relief at the local level.***

The research found little evidence of politicization of relief. In some districts, party leaders were accused of appropriating relief for their constituencies at the very early stage of the earthquake response. However, such accusations and tensions decreased after local relief mechanisms offered opportunities for political parties to collaborate and coordinate relief distribution. Accusations of

political parties interfering in relief distribution were most common in areas where relief distribution mechanisms had to prioritize households—such as in medium and low impact districts where incoming relief was insufficient for blanket distribution and there were greater challenges allocating limited resources.

***Political parties were most commonly accused of interfering in the outcome of damage and needs assessments, especially in medium and low impact districts where assessments were more contentious.***

Conflicts around assessments were generally political in nature with parties lobbying on behalf of disgruntled locals demanding reassessments. Yet, dissatisfaction over damage

assessments likely related primarily to a lack of clear instructions to assessment teams and poor implementation (see Box 3).

***New leadership figures did not emerge after the earthquake.***

With the authority and influence of political parties largely unchallenged, there were limits to the emergence of new leadership. In some areas, youth leaders became more active after the earthquake. But they were active in executing decisions of relief dis-

tribution committees rather than in decision-making. Older party leaders simply chose younger members of the community to assist relief efforts because of their ability to move and act faster without feeling their authority was challenged.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

Ward Citizen Forums rarely challenged political party leaders. Their involvement in relief committees was generally minimal, especially when it came to decision-making. Only in isolated instances did competition

between political leaders lead to tensions that allowed Ward Citizen Forum representatives to become more active and challenge decisions taken by relief committees.

## 4.2 Performance of political parties

*Dissatisfaction with the role political parties played in responding to the earthquake was high.*

While the local administration and local leaders were often assessed positively for their role in relief distribution at the local level, dissatisfaction with the response of political parties was high (Figure 4.1).

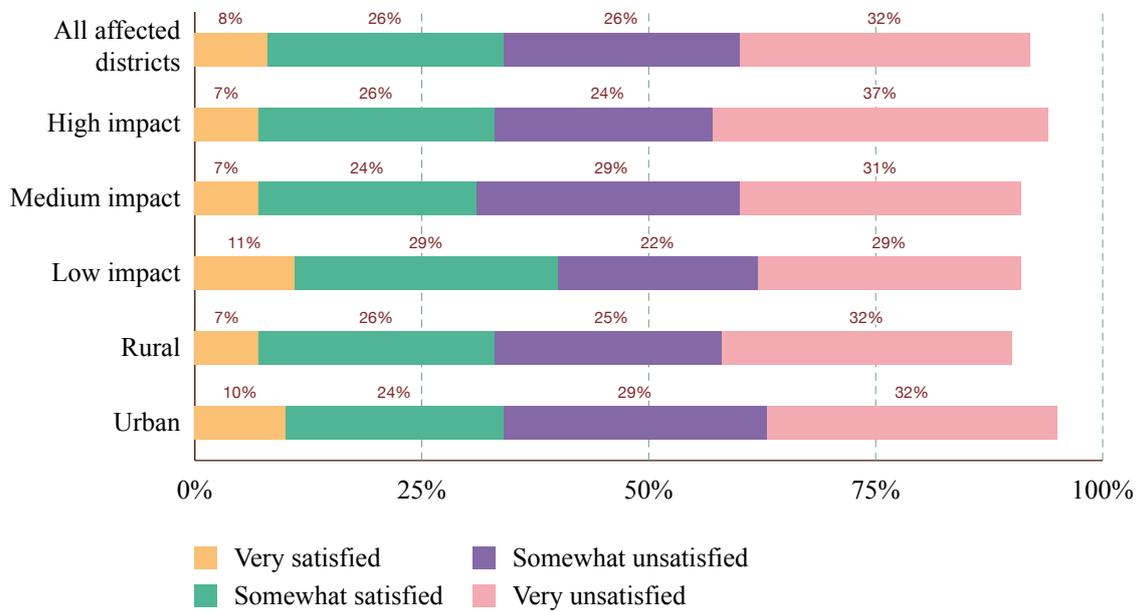


Figure 4.1: Satisfaction with aid response of political parties – by impact and rural/urban

This likely reflects general pre-earthquake levels of dissatisfaction with political parties as well as the fact that elected Constituent Assembly members rarely visited affected

VDCs and municipalities in the first two months after the 25 April earthquake (Figure 4.2).

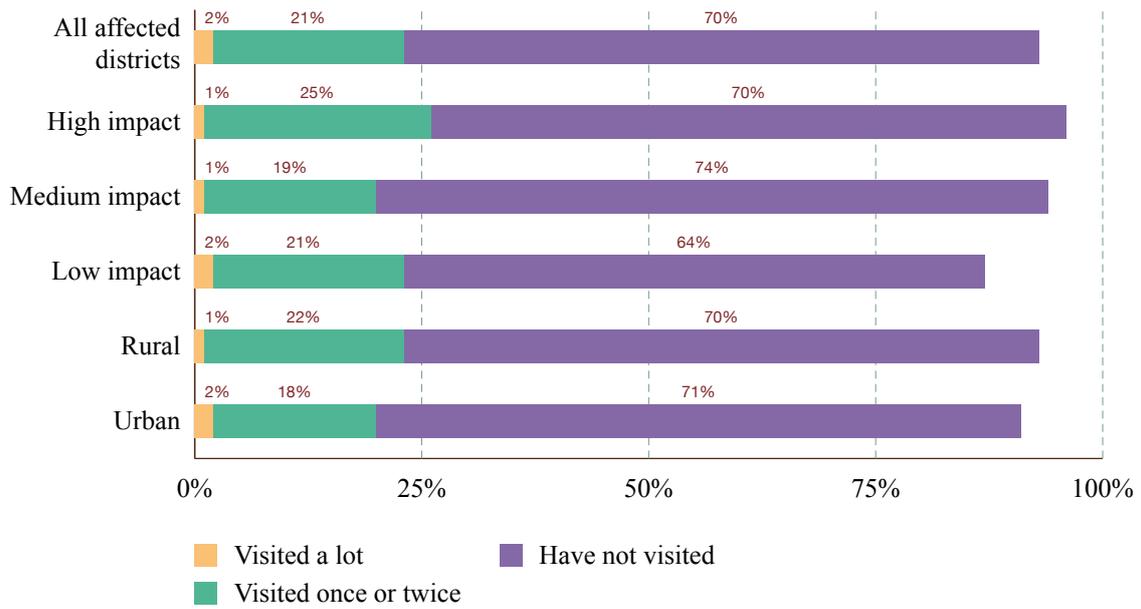


Figure 4.2: Post-earthquake did your Constituent Assembly member visit your area – by district earthquake impact and rural/urban



## 4.3 Political preferences

*The impacts of the earthquakes on the political preferences of voters in affected areas is unclear.*

The majority of people remained undecided on who they would vote for in the next election. When asked about who they would vote for if there were an immediate election, over three-quarters of people did not name a party: 58% said that they did not know, another 14% refused to answer, and 5% said they would not vote.

Of those who had decided who to support, most intended to vote for the party they supported before (Tables 4.1 and 4.2). For example, only 1% of people who voted Nepali Congress in the last election said that they will vote for a different party in the next election; the figure is 2% for CPN-UML and 5% for UCPN(M).

Table 4.1: Current political preferences – by who you voted for before

Voted for in last election	Who would you vote for if an election were held soon?										
	Nepali Congress	CPN-UML	UCPN (M)	RPP-N	RPP	MJF-D	Will not vote	NMKP	Refused	Don't know/ can't say	Total
Nepali Congress	<b>38%</b>	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	10%	48%	100%
CPN-UML	2%	<b>40%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	11%	44%	100%
UCPN(M)	3%	2%	<b>20%</b>	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	14%	57%	100%
RPP-N	3%	0%	3%	<b>33%</b>	0%	0%	8%	0%	6%	47%	100%
RPP	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>35%</b>	0%	4%	0%	13%	48%	100%
MJF-D	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>50%</b>	0%	0%	0%	50%	100%
MJF-N	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
Did not vote	4%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	<b>22%</b>	0%	10%	59%	100%
NMKP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>18%</b>	18%	65%	100%
Refused	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	<b>38%</b>	59%	100%

Table 4.2: Extent to which past political preferences are changing

Who did you vote for previously?	Who will you vote for if an election were held soon?								
	Nepali Congress	CPN-UML	UCPN (M)	RPP-N	RPP	Will not vote	NMKP	Refused	Don't know/ can't say
Nepali Congress	<b>92%</b>	5%	4%		9%	17%		21%	23%
CPN-UML	2%	<b>84%</b>		14%	9%	5%		11%	15%
UCPN(M)	4%	4%	<b>86%</b>			12%		11%	11%
RPP-N			2%	<b>86%</b>		2%		1%	2%
RPP					<b>82%</b>			1%	2%
Did not vote	2%	7%	8%			<b>62%</b>		10%	12%
NMKP							<b>100%</b>	1%	2%
Refused	1%					3%		41%	11%
Don't know/can't say								3%	22%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>

***The performance of political parties in responding to the earthquakes may affect future voting choices.***

There is a possibility that the failure of many to mention who they would vote for was a reaction to the underperformance of politicians or disillusionment with politics, only now exacerbated by the quakes. A higher proportion of people who were satisfied with

political parties during the relief effort said they will not change parties, and people who stated dissatisfaction with political parties' relief work were more likely to be uncertain about who they will choose next time around (Figure 5.3).

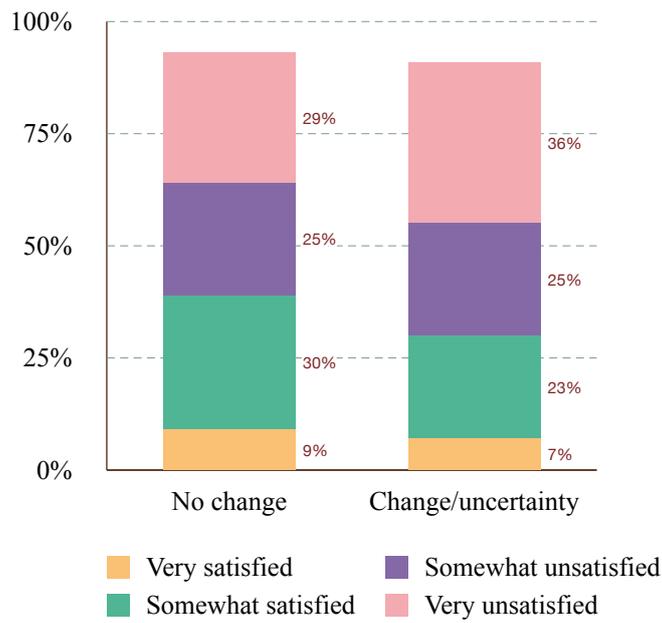


Figure 4.3: Satisfaction with political parties and uncertainty

These findings—ongoing support for the same party among those who have decided who to vote for; and high levels of uncertainty amongst others—suggest that the political impacts of the earthquakes remain uncertain.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

## 5.1 Security and crime

***Crime and violence were not major issues in the two months following the earthquake.***

The earthquake does not appear to have led to an increase in levels of crime. Across all areas, 4% of survey respondents reported a (slight) increase in crime, while 5% said it had fallen (Figure 5.1). High impact districts were the least likely to report an increase in crime; urban wards were more likely than rural ones to report an increase. This may be a function of the increased presence of state security personnel as well as strong intra-community solidarity in earthquake-affected areas.

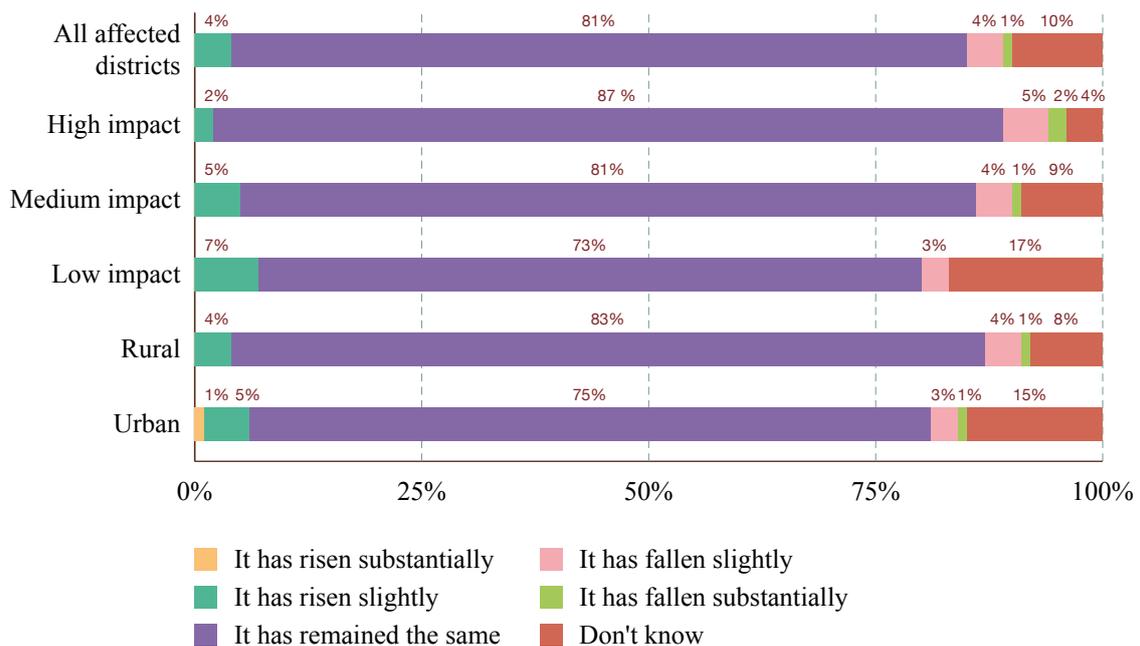


Figure 5.1: Perceived change in crime post-earthquake – by district earthquake impact and rural/urban

***Most people felt safe and few reported violence as having occurred.***

Across all areas, 83% of survey respondents said they felt safe in their communities while 17% said that they did not (Figure 5.2).<sup>19</sup> Levels of perceived safety did not vary substantially by the level of earthquake impact in the district but they did depending on the impacts at the ward level, with respondents in high impact wards much less likely to feel safe: 27% of people in high impact wards said they felt somewhat or very unsafe. People in urban areas were also less likely to feel safe. There were no

substantial differences in the perceived safety of men and women (Figure 5.3).

Where people lived after the earthquake appeared to be an important determinant of their perceived level of safety. Those living in community temporary shelters were the most likely to feel unsafe, whereas those living in their own homes or renting houses were much more likely to feel safe (Figure 5.4).

<sup>19</sup> Surveys may not be best placed to capture all violence, or threats of violence, that are occurring, given people may be reluctant to report these sensitive issues to enumerators. However, findings

from the quantitative survey on the relative absence of violence, crime and intimidation fit with those from the in-depth qualitative fieldwork.

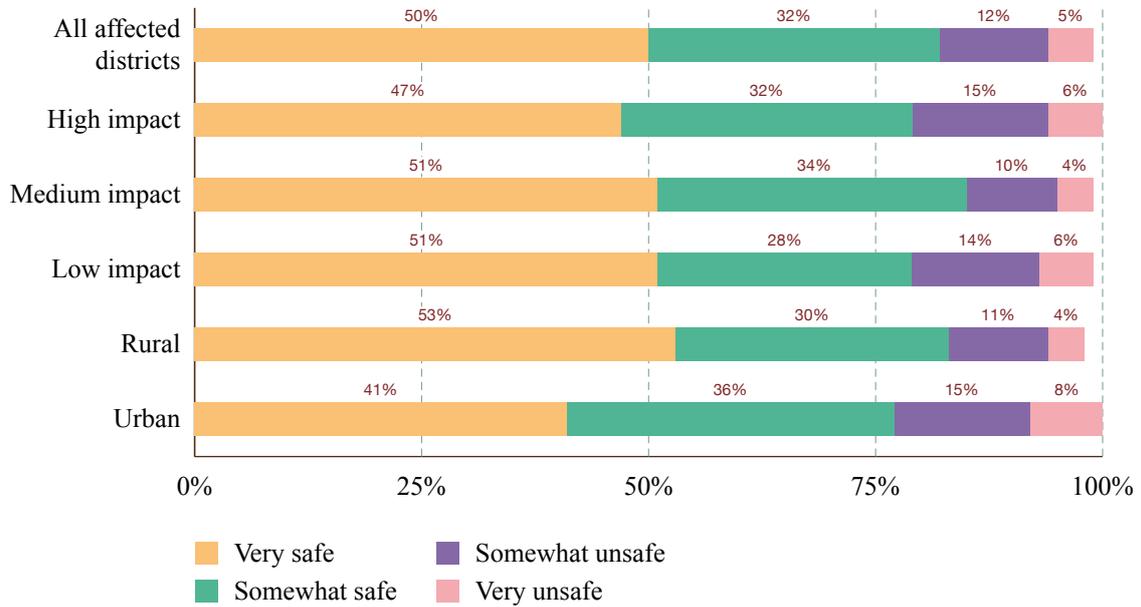


Figure 5.2: Perceptions of safety – by district earthquake impact and rural/urban

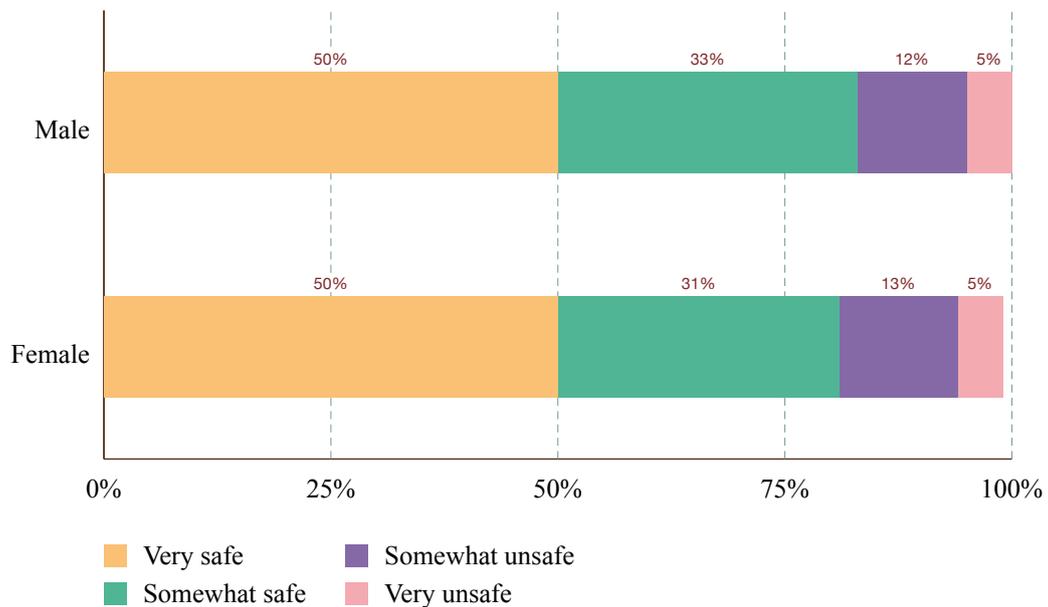


Figure 5.3: Perceptions of safety – by gender

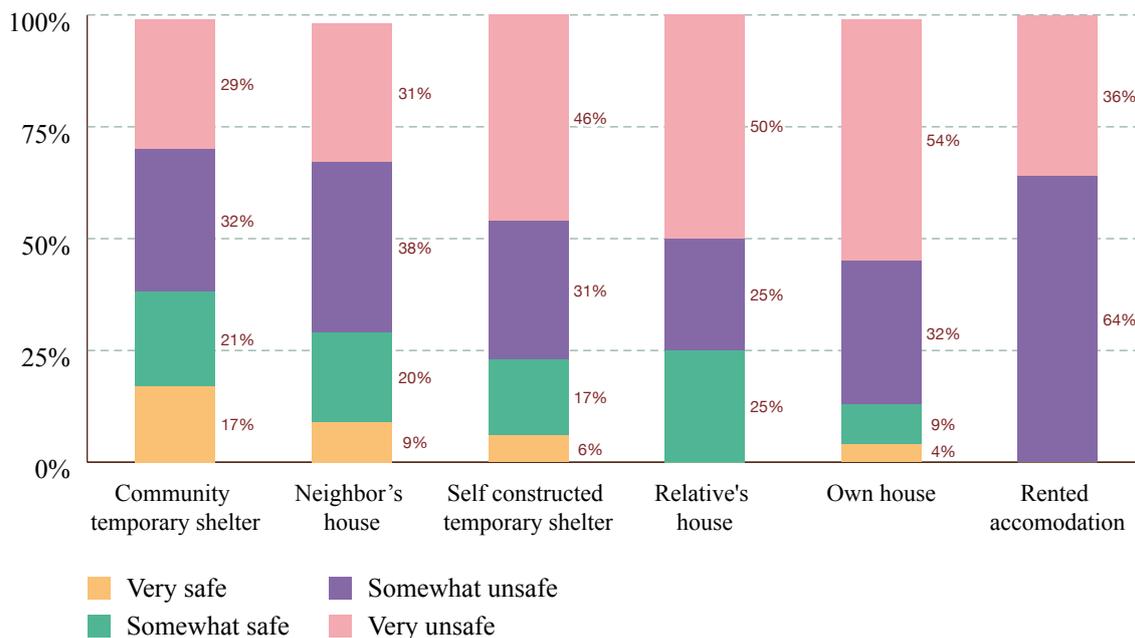


Figure 5.4: Perceptions of safety – by where people live now

## 5.2 Social cohesion

*Social cohesion and intra-community solidarity at the local level, especially in rural areas, remained strong or even increased after the earthquake.*

The equal distribution model adopted by many relief distribution committees appeared to strengthen cooperation, or at least did not undermine it. People were helping each other post-earthquake. In some places, intra-community solidarity included Dalits and other marginalized groups, at least temporarily overriding otherwise prevalent forms of discrimination.

No concrete examples of discriminatory aid distribution practices or social conflict

along ethnic or caste lines were found. However, caste and ethnic inequalities remain salient features of Nepal's society and there were suspicions between groups that others had received more aid or had been more influential in determining how it was distributed. Resentment over perceived inequality was sometimes talked about with reference to caste, ethnicity, or religion, indicating the potential for social tensions as assistance becomes more targeted.

## 5.3 Potential sources of conflict

*Resentment over damage assessments and beneficiary lists, and grievances related to resettlement, could lead to conflicts in the future.*

Conflicts around relief distribution had been more common during the early and more chaotic response and later decreased. However, tensions around the outcome of damage assessments and resettlement remained high and may manifest in conflict if grievances are not addressed and policies are not clearly communicated in advance (see Box 3). Resentment can be expected to flare when actual cash disbursement

for reconstruction takes place, especially in places where assessments were highly contested. Anger was primarily directed toward district administrations. If cash and access to other programs is unevenly distributed based on contested assessments and beneficiary lists, this may shift to an inter-personal level, especially where there are accusations of personal or political favors.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

***Resettlement solutions may generate tensions once they become permanent.***

There were a number of indications of increased grievances and tensions around resettlement decisions. In several instances, the displaced living in community temporary shelters on public or community land were seen as polluting the area, occupying too much space or using too many resources, or as having settled without necessary permissions. Generally, temporary arrangements

were tolerated based on the recognition that they are justified on humanitarian grounds, at least for the monsoon period. Yet, longer-term solutions are less likely to be easily accepted and may generate tensions and conflict over resources if the concerns of all stakeholders are not taken into account and decisions made more transparent.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

While the impacts of the earthquake were widely felt, some groups were rendered particularly vulnerable in its aftermath.

## 6.1 Lower caste and marginalized groups

*Lower caste and indigenous groups (Janajatis) were not disproportionately affected by the earthquakes.*

The level of damage their houses sustained was similar to that of high caste people: the houses of 19% of low caste people were unaffected by the earthquake, compared to 17% of Janajatis and 17% of high caste people. There were no differences between caste groups in where

people were living after the earthquakes. The earthquakes had a smaller impact on the incomes of lower castes than of high castes and Janajatis (Figure 6.1). This is despite the fact that the proportion of people from each caste category working in most occupations was quite similar. The one exception was the daily wage labor sector: 15% of low caste people surveyed said they

worked as laborers compared to 1% of high caste people and 6% of Janajatis. Given that laborers were more highly affected than many others, this suggests that low caste groups were doing different types of daily wage work than others and that the types of work they did were less affected than other forms of daily wage labor.

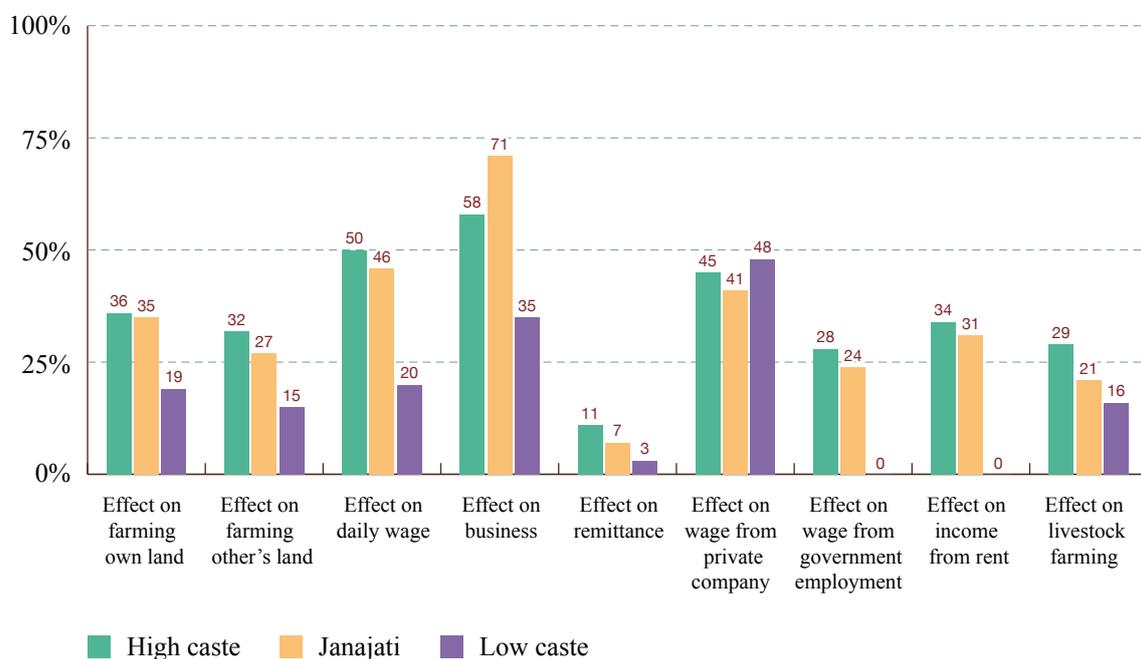


Figure 6.1: Proportion suffering negative impact on their income – by caste

***Lower caste groups did not appear to be discriminated against in accessing most types of aid but they were much less likely to have received cash.***

Table 6.1 shows the proportion of people from different caste groups reporting receiving aid in the most affected areas: high impact wards in high impact districts. Low caste people were *more likely* to get many types of assistance, especially food, tents

and kitchen utensils. But far fewer said they had received cash.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> This is not related to differing levels of housing damage between caste groups. Low caste groups suffered similar levels of damage to others.

Table 6.1: Proportion of people who have received aid in high impacts wards in high impact districts – by caste

	High caste	Janajati	Low caste
Received any type of aid	97%	98%	98%
Tarps	95%	95%	96%
Food	76%	80%	90%
Cash	42%	41%	10%
Blanket	26%	20%	18%
Sanitation package/kits	13%	14%	14%
Corrugated iron sheet	13%	14%	14%
Kitchen utensils/buckets	9%	8%	18%
Medical aid	1%	2%	0%
Mattress	3%	3%	4%
Clothes	2%	2%	2%
Tent	0%	2%	4%
Nets	2%	1%	0%
Solar	0%	1%	0%
No aid received	3%	2%	2%
No need of relief	0%	0%	0%

While low caste groups appeared to be accessing most types of aid as much as others, they were more likely to be dissatisfied with the aid responses of most institutions than other groups, especially high caste people (Table 6.2).<sup>21</sup> Low caste people were particularly more likely to be dissatisfied

with local community organizations and INGOs compared with other caste groups. Low caste groups were also less likely to think VDC/municipalities distributed aid fairly (36% agreed) compared to high caste groups (41%) and Janajatis (42%).

<sup>21</sup> The exceptions are central administration and private business groups. For both, low caste people were more satisfied than other caste categories.

Table 6.2: Proportion dissatisfied with aid responses – by caste

	High caste	Janajati	Low caste
Political parties	54%	60%	60%
Central administration	44%	38%	40%
Private business groups	31%	28%	29%
Local administration	25%	27%	27%
Local community orgs	23%	19%	30%
Religious groups	23%	18%	26%
NGOs	16%	17%	19%
Foreign groups	13%	12%	14%
INGOs	12%	14%	17%
Police	6%	8%	9%
Armed police	6%	9%	11%
Nepal army	5%	9%	9%

***Structural inequalities and prevalent forms of exclusion and discrimination are likely to negatively affect the recovery of low caste groups.***

With the shift from relief to reconstruction, as well as to wider social networks and people with limited or no access to local extra-local resources, are left with fewer representatives and administrative structures, options to cope.

***There are indications that low caste groups face greater difficulties in accessing cash and credit to construct temporary shelters or rebuild homes.***

For example, low caste people who borrowed money were twice as likely as high caste people to say they had borrowed from moneylenders, who charge higher interest rates (Figure 6.2). They were less likely to say they had borrowed from saving and credit groups or cooperatives. And no low caste people in the survey sample reported borrowing money from banks. There is a risk that some low caste people may get stuck in a debt trap (Box 4).

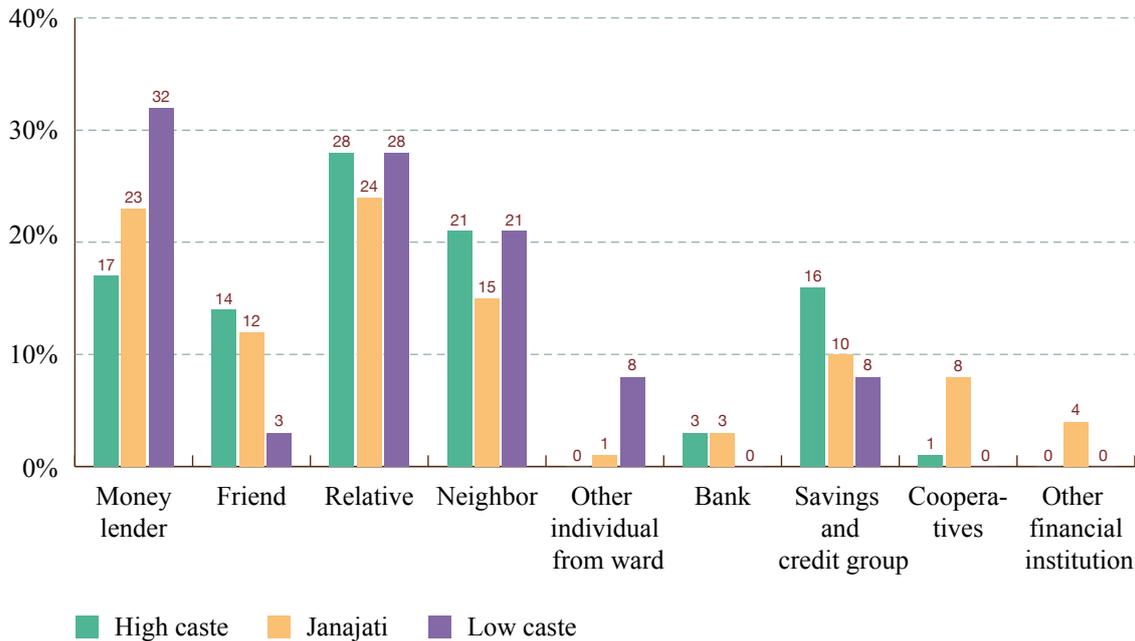


Figure 6.2: Who did different caste groups borrow from?

#### Box 4: Dalit families at risk of high debts

Hopeful of future government compensation and low interest loans for earthquake victims, Dalit households in a village in Okhaldhunga have started taking loans locally to rebuild their houses. Without land for subsistence farming, and living off meager incomes, they had no other option.

Maya, a single mother with three children, lost her house, which was partially damaged during the first earthquake and became unlivable after the second. Initially, she and her children stayed in a makeshift

shelter made of old tarps on a small patch of rented land. Realizing they would not be able to use their house again, they eventually built a sturdier cowshed-type shelter using corrugated iron sheets and tarps. After her house was classified as fully damaged by the government technical assessment team, Maya was optimistic that she would eventually receive compensation and decided to take a loan to begin rebuilding her house.

“We cannot live in the cowshed forever. We will have to rebuild the house

after this monsoon at any cost,” said Maya. Lacking financial means and having already spent several thousand rupees on building an emergency shelter, she was forced to take out a loan. Maya owned a very small patch of land that she used for planting maize but the land where she built her temporary shelter was rented. “We cannot pay the rent for the land on which we have built this emergency shelter,” she said. Like most of her Dalit neighbors, Maya worked on the land of higher caste households to make a living. But she explained that this income would not be enough to rebuild her house. “We cannot even afford two meals a day with our earnings, let alone save any money. So we are bound to take loans from other villagers.”

Maya took a loan from a wealthy neighbor at a high interest rate. But she was confident that she would be able to repay the loan. “They say the government will give us money to build our house. They say that since our house is fully damaged, I will

be receiving an even bigger amount, including some loans at very low interest rates.”

Many people in this village, most of them Dalits, took loans from local moneylenders at high interest rates of up to 36%. Those who had not taken out loans were planning to do so. Most, like Maya, expected that government assistance would allow them to repay their loans—they often referred to the fact that the government had wiped the debts of victims of the last major earthquake in 1988.

But not everyone was as optimistic. One Dalit man was skeptical even though he too had to take out a loan: “Once the monsoon begins, there will be landslides which will affect more people and the government may forget about us. But how can I build a house without the government’s help?” he said. Another man exclaimed: “The government should look after poor victims like us. If not, I will have to go abroad to pay back my loan.”



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

## 6.2 Women, children, and the elderly

*Women do not appear to have been disproportionately affected by the earthquake and have accessed aid.*

There were no substantial differences in the perceived safety of men and women (see Figure 5.3 above) and there have been very few reports of incidents of crime or abuse targeting women. At an aggregate level, women do not appear to be missing out on aid. Women were more likely to be satisfied with every aid provider than men.

They were equally likely to be satisfied with the distribution of aid by VDCs and municipalities. Fifty-five percent of men agreed that aid had been distributed by VDCs/municipalities fairly while 54% of women said the same. There was little difference in the stated needs of men and women (Figure 6.3).

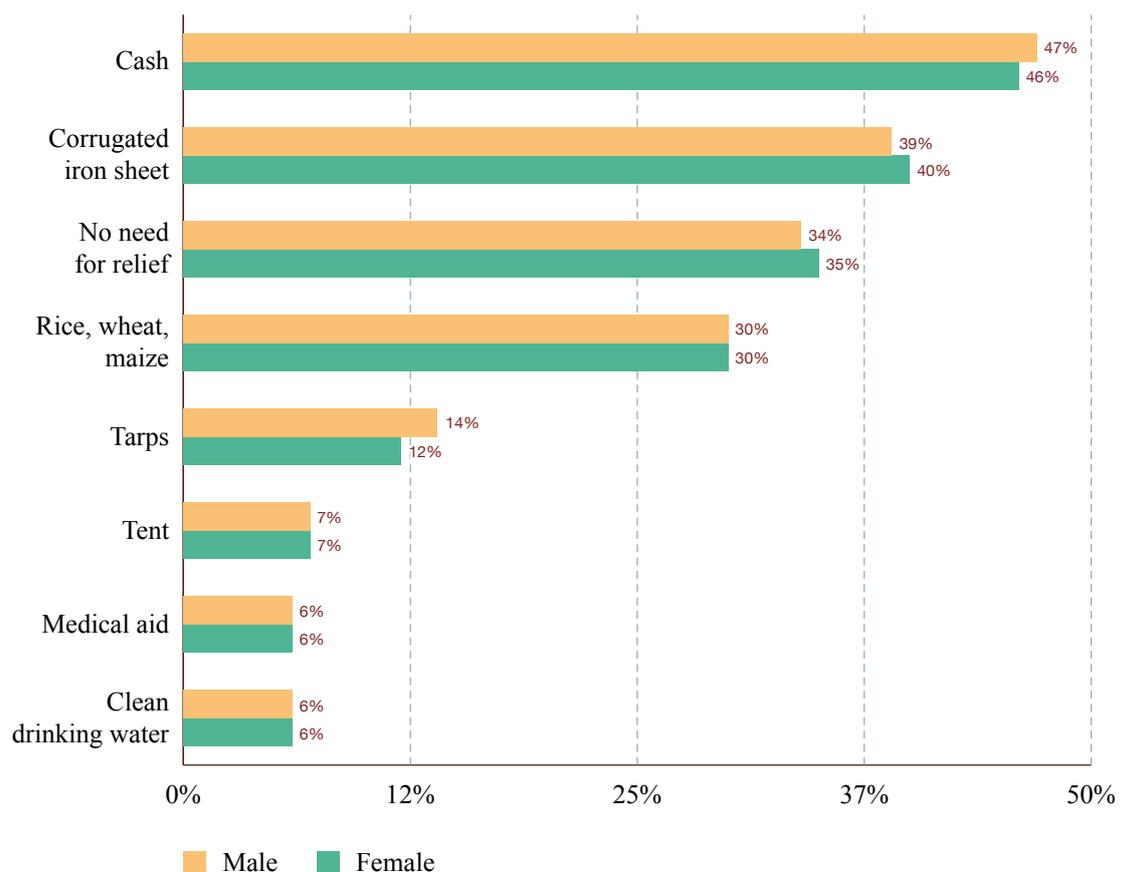


Figure 6.3: Immediate needs (top three needs) – by gender

*Nevertheless, some women face risks and uncertainties that are not present to the same extent for men.*

The qualitative research found that many women felt exposed in temporary shelters and showed greater signs of distress than men. Single and widowed women were particularly vulnerable, facing greater logistical and administrative challenges in accessing

relief while also having to tend to their children and fields and earn an income (Box 5). Further, a lack of representation of women in government and relief distribution mechanisms is likely to leave some of the issues affecting women unaddressed.

### **Box 5: Widows facing difficulties accessing relief**

At a VDC center in Dolakha where earthquake victim identity cards were distributed, a 75-year-old widow claimed that she had not received cash relief from the state that was distributed to all those in Dolakha whose houses had been damaged. “I don’t know if my sons have claimed it,” she said.

“The VDC Secretary said that I ought to get NPR 15,000, which was issued in my youngest son’s name. But my youngest son and his wife are not here – they have to look after their own family. All my sons live separately. I eat alone, wash dishes alone, sleep alone. Right now I live in a temporary shelter and I have been waiting for NPR 15,000 for three days.”

She was not the only widow denied her share of relief. In another ward in the same VDC, an old woman said: “I have my citizenship card but this is

not enough. They need the citizenship card of my middle son who is not here; he only visits once or twice a year. I will not get relief, they say. We don’t have the support of our husbands – they are gone. Only our sons can support us but they are too busy with their lives.”

District officials in Dolakha explained that identity cards are only distributed to the owners of the damaged property. They said: “It is the responsibility of the son to look after his mother, and to come back to his district to claim relief for her. The state cannot provide relief to a mother who is not a legal owner of the property, and cannot do much if the sons are not around.”

Unable to receive their share without the presence and citizenship cards of their sons, many widowed mothers were denied access to relief.



Photo: Nayan Pokharel

***Children were under great distress in many of the medium and high affected areas.***

Children were often found facing difficulties sleeping and concentrating. Many feared entering their homes or schools and walking across landslide-prone areas to access relief

or attend school. Children's education had been severely interrupted due to the high and widespread levels of damages to schools.

***The elderly were also more vulnerable to distress and trauma as well as health hazards.***

Many said they did not want to leave their land, even where the risk of landslides is high, refusing to resettle elsewhere. In some cases, the elderly had thus been left behind on their own, having to fend for themselves, sometimes without adequate shelter and aid.

Further, the elderly, in particular widows, faced greater difficulties accessing and claiming relief. In at least one district, the elderly (above 70 years of age, or above 65 for Dalits) had to rely on the presence and willingness of their children to access relief, which meant significant difficulties for those living on their own (see Box 5).

## 6.3 The displaced and those incorrectly categorized

***The displaced faced greater uncertainty and were more vulnerable to diseases, threats and exploitation.***

Living conditions in joint shelters for the displaced remained difficult. Lack of space and hygiene, and exposure to monsoon rains, heat or cold, insects, snakes, and wild animals, were widespread concerns. The risk of diseases and psychological distress ultimately left the displaced more vulnerable. It is therefore unsurprising that those in joint community shelters were more likely to feel unsafe, even though few incidents of violence or open conflict had been reported (see Figure 5.4 above).

Many displaced households did not know whether they will be able to return to their land and rebuild their houses and were therefore left without the ability to plan ahead. Settled under temporary and informal arrangements, and with uncertain

futures, displaced groups were more exposed to threats of removal/resettlement and various forms of exploitation. A lack of clarity on needs and mechanisms for resettlement—the absence of thorough landslide risk assessments and longer-term resettlement plans—exacerbates uncertainty and vulnerability.

If resettlement questions remain unresolved, tensions may increase, leading to various forms of conflict that could further increase the vulnerability of displaced groups. There are already indications that uncertainty around resettlement issues is a potential conflict driver (see Section 5). Some groups are likely to resist government resettlement efforts, refusing to be resettled once more or on land too far from their previous homes.

***Inadequate beneficiary lists may mean that households miss out on assistance they need and they are entitled to.***

Damage assessments were conducted haphazardly and inconsistently (see Box 3). Many houses were categorized incorrectly and beneficiary lists were widely considered incomplete. Some ad hoc measures were taken to address this and allow people to file complaints. However, marginalized groups and those facing greater difficulties accessing government services and political support, including those in geographically remote regions, are less likely to be able to lodge complaints to receive the support they are due.

Further, with assessments focused on damage to houses, most other losses and needs were not accounted for and may not be compensated. The damage suffered by those in rented accommodation, for example, have not been assessed. People in urban and semi-urban areas were more likely to be affected by this, as they often do not have land to fall back on.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

**T**his report has presented findings from in-depth qualitative fieldwork and a large representative survey conducted around six weeks after the 25 April earthquake. We conclude with a summary of some of the implications for policy makers and aid practitioners working to help the affected recover.

## 7.1 Improving aid distribution

### *Utilize and improve the VDC mechanisms for aid coordination.*

The research found that despite the chaos and confusion surrounding relief distribution in the first few weeks after the earthquake, the government was ultimately able to institute effective distribution mechanisms. Although most earthquake-affected communities indicated that they needed more support than had been provided, the mechanisms of distribution—centralized through DDRCs and channeled through RDCs—were assessed positively locally. Local RDCs played an important role in bringing aid to remote wards. They distributed aid in ways that built upon nuanced understandings of needs in their communities and that minimized social

tensions. They played an important role in mediating between affected populations, the district administration, and humanitarian organizations.

The system also has weaknesses. RDCs and their sub-committees were lacking systematic procedures for registering and responding to complaints and requests for information. Citizen participation beyond local leaders was marginal. More marginalized groups—socially or geographically—had limited access to them. Their workings were not always transparent.<sup>22</sup>

### Implications

- International donors and aid agencies should seek to work through and with the government coordination mechanisms at the local level;
- Donors and the government should work together to find ways to improve the quality and capacity of the RDCs. Over the longer run, having local elections would help. In the immediate term, this should involve instituting complaints procedures. Efforts should be made to ensure wider and direct participation at the ward and VDC levels, especially with regards to the inclusion of women and marginalized communities;
- Watchdog mechanisms should be integrated into the lowest level of government to assist on the above. This may involve some adjustments to existing WCF mechanisms introduced by LGCDP.

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<sup>22</sup> The absence of elected local government for the past 14 years has made it more difficult for citizens to hold local leaders to account.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

***Make sure assistance reaches highly impacted wards in medium impact districts.***

The study found that some wards in medium and low impact districts were missing out from assistance, with aid providers concentrated in highly affected districts, leading to tensions in these areas.

**Implication**

- Utilize ward and VDC level data on damages rather than district data in determining where aid providers should go.

***Be aware of the dangers of individual targeting based on current assessments.***

Problems around household damage and needs assessments were more pronounced than relief distribution. Inconsistent categorization of damage, a lack of clear policies, and multiple assessments conducted at different levels caused problems and tensions.

Suspicion of political interference in damage assessments was high in some places, especially in medium impact districts. Given that these assessments may determine the extent of reconstruction support provided to

affected households, discontent with assessment procedures could manifest in conflict directed at the government as well as within earthquake-affected communities.

### Implications

- The government should re-assess damage to homes with full transparency regarding policies and procedures;
- There is a need to revise the categories of disaster impact (destroyed, damaged) so recovery assistance is weighted more appropriately above and beyond a minimum that must be given to all impacted;
- There should be a community verification mechanism that allows people to review the accuracy of damage assessments and beneficiary lists, with mechanisms of appeal established and clearly explained.

### ***Develop mechanisms that allow for the sharing of cash and support across households.***

By and large, communities preferred equal distribution models that provide support to all those in the local population who have been affected. This flows in part from local norms that emphasize the moral legitimacy of sharing resources within communities along with a feeling that everyone was

affected by the earthquakes. It is also a result of a desire to minimize social tensions between those who receive assistance and those who do not. Donors and aid providers should acknowledge this and design programs accordingly to the extent possible.

### Implications

- Where possible, aid should be provided to all affected households rather than a subset to minimize tensions;
- Where aid is not of sufficient volume to be given to all, aid providers should seek to provide at least some support to households that are not direct beneficiaries, even if this is only in the form of distribution of educational materials—for example on how households can access financing for home reconstruction or information on basic principles for constructing earthquake-resistant structures.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

### ***Communicate government policies and plans more clearly.***

Many people were finding it difficult to make plans for their future because it remained unclear what assistance will arrive and who will be entitled to it. In the absence of this, rumors spread more easily and people may make ill-informed decisions, for example borrowing money at high interest rates with the expectation that government assistance will arrive soon. Reducing uncertainty is key.

#### Implications

- A clear framework should be developed outlining what the major government and donor programs will be, who will be entitled to them, and when assistance will arrive;
- Extensive efforts should be made to communicate these policies and programs to affected communities.

## 7.2 Key areas for future aid

### ***Focus on building back better.***

A key reason why some areas were more affected by the earthquake than others was the quality of housing present there. In particular, houses made with mud mortar were particularly prone to collapse or suffer severe damage.

#### Implication

- Government and donor programs should seek to ensure that newly constructed houses are more robust to earthquakes and other natural disasters than what was there before, taking in to account local preferences.

### ***Provide cash and access to credit.***

As of June 2015, markets were functioning properly. In most cases, people preferred cash to in-kind assistance. Different individuals have different sets of needs – for example, one person may prioritize rebuilding their house, while another may require replacing the stock their business lost. Cash is useful because it allows beneficiaries to prioritize across the different needs they have. Most households plan to apply for substantial loans to repair or reconstruct their homes. Facilitating access to reconstruction finance will further improve the recovery process as a robust period of reconstruction will likely boost demand in local labor markets. Most households in earthquake-affected areas rely on at least some income from labor to supplement their agricultural yields, and a strong reconstruction economy will be of positive benefit to them.

#### Implications

- Clear policies on the delivery of cash should be developed and implemented uniformly across districts, with clear communication of these to communities. It is important to be very careful about targeting;
- Programs should be developed to facilitate access to affordable credit for victims, including marginalized communities. To help those who do not have the means, the government needs to set aside a fund that subsidizes the cost of loans to both borrower and lenders. This means discounted interest and elongated payback periods for the former and default protection for the former.

***Develop geological landslide assessments and resettlement plans.***

The most vulnerable earthquake-affected communities are those that have been displaced due to landslides or the threat of future landslides. These communities have often resettled under temporary and informal arrangements, and are exposed to threats of removal and various forms of exploitation. A lack of thorough land assessments has left most of these communities with uncertain futures.

Implication

- Clear plans for assessments and permanent resettlement need to be developed.

***Develop programs for the recovery of small businesses.***

Most households in earthquake-affected areas rely on subsistence farming as their primary source of livelihood. Relative to households that rely on farming, the number of households that rely on income from small businesses is small. Many of these households, however, lost their entire livelihood after the earthquake and have no land of their own to fall back on. Focused programs should be developed to help such households recover.

Implication

- Develop programs for small business owners, such as access to financing to reestablish their business or skills trainings to develop new sources of income.

***Have an extra focus on the vulnerable.***

The research does not point to systematic discrimination against low caste people or women during relief distribution. Lower caste groups were just as likely, or more likely, to access most forms of aid, but they were much less likely to have received cash. They were also not accessing bank loans, turning instead to moneylenders who charge much higher rates of interest. There were no substantial reported differences in aid received by gender, and at an aggregate level, women were no less likely to feel safe than men. However, there was some insecurity for women living in temporary shelters and women-headed households were finding it more challenging to access aid. Nevertheless, donors and aid providers should be aware of the structural discrimination that exists in Nepali society. This will be of particular importance in the coming months as support for home reconstruction

may depend largely on navigating various bureaucratic channels. Special attention should be given to those communities that are underrepresented and may have greater difficulties accessing the bureaucracy due to their marginalized social standing or geographic remoteness.

### Implications

- Continue to monitor the extent to which vulnerable groups such as low caste people and women are accessing aid and the needs they have;
- Ensure access of these groups to aid schemes and credit;
- Develop measures to enhance their participation in local decision-making, for example through the RDCs, to ensure their views and needs are represented.

## 7.3 Ongoing monitoring of evolving needs and patterns of recovery

***Continue to systematically monitor how needs are evolving and recovery is proceeding.***

This report has outlined findings on the impacts people have experienced, and the ways in which they are recovering, around two months after the April 25 earthquake. However, many of these impacts, and the ways they shape recovery, will evolve over time. The arrival of larger-scale reconstruction programs may pose challenges for social relations and cohesion. There is a possibility that in some places there will be a breakdown in social relations if concerns regarding damage assessments are not addressed and if perceptions of unfairness in targeted distribution are not taken seriously. Political preferences, and the role of different leaders, may change over time, in part in response to how effective (or not) medium and longer term recovery programs are. And new economic challenges will emerge. In other contexts, such as Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis, some got stuck in debt traps and had to sell their land, increasing inequality and poverty. Moving forward, it is important to track the different challenges

people in earthquake-affected areas face, and specific needs they have, in order to ensure an efficient response. This is particularly important for marginalized groups, such as women and low caste groups, to ensure they are not left behind.

### Implication

- Continue to monitor the evolving impacts and patterns of recovery over the coming year.







**The Asia Foundation**

