

# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Realising the potential of partnerships in the Nepal earthquake response



# Acknowledgements

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This report was commissioned by a consortium of UK-based international non-governmental organisations, which included:

- ActionAid
- CARE
- CAFOD
- Christian Aid
- Oxfam GB
- Tearfund.

The research project was overseen by Tearfund's Humanitarian Policy Officer, Tim Ingram, and supported by a steering committee which included:

- Jane Backhurst (Senior Adviser Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy, Christian Aid)
- Francisco Yermo (Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy Adviser, ActionAid)
- Anne Street (Head of Humanitarian Policy, CAFOD)
- Debbie Hillier (Senior Humanitarian Policy Adviser, Oxfam)
- Frédérique Lehoux (Humanitarian Partnership Coordinator, CARE).

The report was written by Andy Featherstone, with assistance from Subindra Bogati, who supported the research and contributed to the report. The six commissioning NGOs have provided invaluable support both in Nepal and the UK, and particular thanks are owed to Tim Ingram in the UK, and Douwe Dijkstra, Tearfund's Country Director in Nepal, for their support in guiding the process. The research would not have been possible without the kind assistance of CARE Nepal and Oxfam in facilitating the trips to Gorkha and Sindhupalchok respectively.

The participation in the study of both national and international members of the humanitarian community is testament to the commitment that exists to realising the potential of partnership in Nepal. We are grateful to all those who invested their valuable time in the research process.

Cover photo by Tom Price / Tearfund: Progress continues on the construction of Thuli Maya's new earthquake-resilient house in Tistung VDC, Makwanpur district. Steel-reinforced bracing and regular concrete layers are some of the elements that will make this house, and the 600 other houses Tearfund plans to build in Makwanpur, safer in the event of another earthquake.

**Opportunity Knocks:** Realising the potential of partnerships in the Nepal earthquake response – November 2016

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# Abstract

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## **Opportunity Knocks: Realising the potential of partnerships in the Nepal earthquake response**

Andy Featherstone and Subindra Bogati

Humanitarian response is all too often characterised by large international responses; in contrast, the approach of the Government of Nepal that required all international NGOs to work through national and district-based partners for all but the initial phase of the earthquake response offered a real-time opportunity for the humanitarian community to put principles of partnership into practice.

This study draws on discussions with civil society, NGOs, UN agencies and government staff in Kathmandu and the districts of Gorkha and Sindhupalchok to harvest lessons from the experience to inform and strengthen future preparedness and response in Nepal, and to strengthen global advocacy on the need for further investment in, and support for, local and national leadership of humanitarian response.



# Executive summary

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## Introduction

In the Oxford online dictionary, the definition of 'opportunity knocks' is given as 'a chance of success occurs'<sup>1</sup> and this is true of partnership in the Nepal earthquake response: for the first time in Nepal and for one of the first times in response to a large-scale disaster, the international humanitarian community has been united in its early adoption of partnership as the dominant modality of providing relief and recovery. At the time of writing, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) has acknowledged the importance of using and not replacing local capacity, and it is hoped that the findings from this study will provide practical support to efforts to 'localise' humanitarian response.

While there have already been several strategic reviews of the earthquake response conducted by members of the international humanitarian system, **this study is different in that it seeks to capture and amplify the perceptions of national responders about partnership performance in the earthquake response and how the international humanitarian system can provide better and more predictable support for disaster response in the future.**

### The role of partnership in the earthquake surge and relief response

At an international level, there are encouraging signs that the negative experiences from the international surge triggered after Typhoon Haiyan and documented in the *Missed Again* report are being translated into action with calls for greater investment in national-level first responders. While in Nepal there had been some efforts taken to prepare, the investment made in localising

surge capacity had been limited and after the earthquake the focus of many INGOs was to strengthen their own capacity in advance of that of their partners. If disaster response is to be localised, there is an important need to prioritise funding for preparedness and surge capacity both nationally and at a district level.

In terms of the effectiveness of the earthquake response, the findings of the research supported by secondary evidence suggest that partnerships made an essential contribution to the breadth and depth of humanitarian action, although the need to broker new partnerships to reach the scale required may have slowed the response. UN figures suggest that in the initial relief phase many of the priority needs were met, which goes some way to answering one of the most vexing partnership challenges – that of whether partnership can deliver humanitarian assistance at scale. With a few caveats, the earthquake response suggests that it can.

### NGO partnership approaches and an assessment of performance

The earthquake response offered some examples of good practice: for pre-existing partnerships, INGOs brought knowledge, training, trust and ambition, which supported local NGOs to quickly scale up and to work more effectively with their international partners. In contrast, newer partnerships were frequently more project-based, with local NGOs often confined to subcontracting roles as INGOs replaced rather than reinforced local capacity. A number of partnership challenges were encountered by local NGOs (see table on page iii) but it was the lack of equity in partnerships that was the most significant concern, and it has taken time for INGOs to start to address this.

## Background to the *Missed Opportunities* research series

This report is part of a series of studies originally commissioned by five UK development and humanitarian agencies (ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund) that have been collaborating since early 2012 to document and research partnership experiences with local actors in humanitarian responses.

To date the group of five agencies have worked on four documents. Published in September 2013, *Missed Opportunities* assessed the potential for partnerships to contribute to the effectiveness of humanitarian response. This was followed by the *Missed Again* report – a real-time review of the response to Typhoon Haiyan, which was

published in September 2014. The third instalment of the research series, *Missed Out*, was published in May 2016 and examined the role of partnership in responding to humanitarian needs as a result of the South Sudan conflict. In the run-up to the WHS, findings from the research series were summarised in a synthesis paper, *Missed Opportunities No More*, which, on the basis of the findings, advocates for the localisation of aid and greater global support for humanitarian partnerships.

As part of expanding this research series CARE, originally a research partner for this project, became a full member of the commissioning group in 2016.

## Challenges of INGO – local NGO partnerships

Partnership challenge	Description
Capacity building	The need to rapidly scale up existing and new partnerships created a need to develop skills at the same time as delivering assistance. While innovative strategies were used to achieve this, there has been a tendency to focus on project-level capacity building rather than organisational-level capacity development. While this trend is beginning to change, it will take considerable time to make the shift.
Issues of equity	There is a perception among many local NGOs that INGOs have tended to prioritise investment in their own capacity over that of their partners. While this may be defensible in other contexts where INGOs have been operational, it is more problematic in the context of Nepal where the majority of programmes are being delivered by partners, with INGOs playing an oversight role.
Shared partners	At a district level many local NGOs are now responsible for multi-million-dollar project portfolios which dwarf their pre-earthquake responsibilities. This funding is often comprised of a range of multi-sectoral INGO-funded relief projects. The associated need to accommodate project approaches and business practices of several INGOs was considered to be a significant challenge, particularly given the perceived failure of INGOs to coordinate with each other.

The relationship between INGOs and local NGOs and some of the successes and challenges of partnerships during the earthquake response are exemplified in the two case studies in this executive summary.

In order to assess partnership performance, the first three *Missed Opportunities* studies used humanitarian evaluation criteria to compare the effectiveness of

INGO and local NGO humanitarian partnerships,<sup>2</sup> but with the endorsement of the Charter for Change at the WHS,<sup>3</sup> there is now a more relevant lens with which to assess performance. In the table below, key commitments are listed alongside a performance assessment and rating based on the findings of the research (strong, good, moderate, poor or weak).

## Assessment of Nepal partnerships against key commitments in the Charter for Change

#	Description of commitment	Assessment of performance based on the research findings	Performance rating
1	Increase direct funding to southern-based NGOs for humanitarian action	An unprecedented proportion of funding was passed through INGOs to local NGOs. However, very little funding was passed to NGOs either directly or through pooled funding modalities.	MODERATE
4	Stop undermining local capacity	The findings of the research suggest that far fewer local NGO staff were recruited into INGO staff than often occurs in crises of similar magnitude, although the government requirement for the prioritisation of partnerships also meant that many INGOs did not scale up to the same extent as they would usually do.	GOOD
6	Address subcontracting	The scale of the response delivered through partnerships and the lack of humanitarian experience of many partners meant that a subcontracting approach was adopted by many organisations. Partner-led INGOs with smaller budgets tended to establish stronger partnerships.	MODERATE/ POOR
7	Provide robust organisational support and capacity strengthening	With only a few exceptions, organisational support over the first 12 months has tended to focus at the project level with an increase in strategic capacity building in a few cases in recent months.	MODERATE
8	Communication to the media and the public about partners	Performance was mixed, with an equal number of INGO communications acknowledging and failing to acknowledge that assistance was delivered by partners. For relief distributions, there were frequent concerns that it was the INGO name that was printed on items that were being distributed by their partners.	MODERATE

## Conclusions and recommendations – from ‘missed opportunities’ to ‘opportunity knocks’

The *Missed Opportunities* study series has documented changes in INGO partnership practices over the last three years during which time there has been significant progress made in recognising the value of national response capacity. With the inclusion in the Grand Bargain of a donor commitment to provide direct funding to local NGOs and the launch of the NEAR network (Network for Empowered Aid Response), a global movement of southern NGOs committed to reshaping the humanitarian and development system to one that is locally driven and owned,<sup>4</sup> the policy and practice landscape is rapidly changing.

In placing far greater responsibility in the hands of local actors to lead and deliver humanitarian assistance, it could be argued that the earthquake response was a reaction to these shifts, but this is not true as the pre-eminence of partnership was as much a consequence of government policy as it was INGO preference. However, the Nepal earthquake has offered the international humanitarian

community an opportunity to experience humanitarian response as it is likely to be delivered more frequently in the future – led by government and delivered by local organisations, with the international humanitarian system playing a support role. Given the infrequency with which this happens, it should come as no surprise that the response had its challenges. Despite these, there is much to commend in what has been achieved by the different partnerships established during the response, which also offers significant lessons about what needs to change to strengthen collaboration in the future.

### So what needs to change?

Fundamentally, there is a need to close the gap between rhetoric and reality with INGOs more consistently reinforcing rather than replacing local NGO capacity. While this shift is happening in the Nepal earthquake response, it has taken too long. There needs to be a far greater emphasis by the international humanitarian system and INGOs on identifying partners and investing in capacity development for surge and response in advance of crises. This will require a broader and deeper level of engagement with local NGOs outside of disaster response with a view to reducing the need for support when crises

### CASE STUDY

#### INGO experiences from the Nepal earthquake response

The International NGO has a humanitarian programme in excess of £30 million for the earthquake response and has had a presence in Nepal for many years.

As part of its response, it scaled up its programme in one of the worst-affected districts where it had previously partnered with an advocacy NGO. Because of these historical links, a partnership agreement was able to be established swiftly and responsibility for programme delivery in seven Village Development Committees (VDCs) was handed from the INGO to the partner, albeit with the INGO retaining responsibility for procurement and logistics. The partner was responsible for local mobilisation.

At the same time, the INGO scaled up its programme in a further nine VDCs for which relief assistance was being provided operationally while partners were identified. Implementation was a challenge due to the remote location and the distance from its base in the district capital.

While there were a number of local NGOs that expressed an interest in taking on the project, capacity assessments undertaken in the first two months after the earthquake revealed that very few of them had sufficient capacity to implement and several of them already had significant commitments to other INGO partners and so were unlikely to be able to absorb the additional responsibilities. A number of other NGOs had no previous experience in the technical sectors that the INGO was working in.

After several months of partner assessments, a decision was taken to work with two local NGOs, splitting the VDCs between them. In order to maintain momentum at the same time as building capacity for implementation, an initial three-month partnership plan was devised which provided close support including joint implementation. This was followed by a phased approach to handing over operations and budgetary handling which went from an initial 80%:20% ratio to 70%:30% to the current situation where the INGO has responsibility for 60% of the operations and budget and the partner holds 40% of the responsibility.

At the height of the response when the INGO was involved in operational delivery in the district, it had 63 staff based in the district including staff embedded in the partner organisation. As responsibilities have been handed over, this has decreased to 33 staff with the partner taking over roles previously occupied by the INGO, which has now adopted a monitoring and support role.

Accompanying this process of gradual handover has been a strategy of operational capacity building, which has sought to target areas that either carry most risk (finance, logistics) or that are linked to technical operations (WASH, cash distributions). One of the key lessons from the first 12 months of the response is that partner staff turnover is extremely high, which has led to a change of strategy to focus more on strategic capacity building that focuses at the organisational level in an effort to strengthen its sustainability rather than maintaining a focus at project level.

are occurring. The same emphasis on organisational capacity strengthening that has accompanied the growth of international NGOs now needs to be focused at a national level, with a view to fostering a vibrant national humanitarian response capacity that can implement both in partnership and in an independent capacity.

The lessons from the earthquake response must be used to transform the humanitarian system both in Nepal and globally by taking urgent action to:

- **strengthen** partnerships between international and national responders for preparedness planning
- **reinforce** collaboration to build local capacity for humanitarian surge and response
- **continue to improve** partnership practice to make the shift from international to national response.

### The need to strengthen partnership between international and national responders for preparedness planning

Who	What	Where
Donors	There is an urgent need for continued global investment in preparedness planning and capacity in Nepal but in a way that is situated in the local context and that builds on existing structures. At a central level, donors should continue to support the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC) to strengthen preparedness and response.	Nepal
INGOs and UN agencies	There is a need to strengthen governmental and non-governmental preparedness at the district level across the country. The District Lead Support Agency role offers an excellent opportunity to achieve this.	Nepal

### The need to strengthen collaboration and build local capacity for humanitarian surge and response

Who	What	Where
Donors	Given the evidence of the earthquake response in which local NGOs played a leadership role and in the spirit of the Grand Bargain, donors must find a means of directly funding local NGOs whether through the establishment of a pooled funding facility or through bilateral agreements. The development of this fund before disaster strikes will allow time to establish it outside of the pressures of response.	Nepal
Government, INGOs and UN agencies	Government policies on targeting of assistance failed to include some of those who were most vulnerable. It is urgent that a coordinated and principled approach for joint assessment and targeting can be agreed for adoption in future disasters.	Nepal
INGOs and UN agencies	International organisations should shift from investing in their own surge capacity to supporting that of their partners in advance of crises. This will require a broader and deeper level of engagement with local NGOs outside of disaster response.	Nepal and Global
INGOs and UN agencies	It will be necessary for international organisations to change the mindsets and skill sets of international surge staff to ensure they have the right attitude and relevant skills to work collaboratively with partners in the earliest stages of a response.	Global
Local NGOs	Based on the experience of the earthquake response, local NGOs should review their own standby arrangements to ensure that they are organisationally prepared to respond in the future. This should include negotiations with their INGO partners on support for preparedness planning and equitable partnership arrangements for disaster response.	Nepal

## The importance of continuing to improve partnership practice in order to make the shift from international to national response

Who	What	Where
INGOs and UN agencies	There is a need to revise existing humanitarian partnership models based on the earthquake response in order to accommodate the delivery of assistance through partnership at scale and to inculcate these into organisational practice.	Nepal and Global
INGOs and UN agencies	Models of humanitarian delivery through local partners must be accompanied by sustained investments in local NGO organisational capacity to a standard and quality that permits a shift to partner-led response.	Nepal and Global
INGOs and UN agencies	The Grand Bargain negotiated during the World Humanitarian Summit has provided a context for increasing the efficiencies and effectiveness of the humanitarian system, and these changes must be role-modelled in how INGOs work with shared partners where standardised approaches to reporting and a shared commitment to providing support would reduce administrative effort and strengthen the potential for capacity development.	Nepal and Global
Charter for Change signatories	While the commitments outlined in the Charter for Change offer essential guidance for partnership situations such as the earthquake response, there is a need to develop a simple set of measurable indicators for each of the commitments to permit a level of oversight that could assist in determining progress made against this important set of obligations.	Global
Local NGOs	Membership of the NEAR network offers an important opportunity for local NGOs to influence the wider policies and practices of the humanitarian system that affect their capacities and operations and the well-being of communities.	Nepal and Global

### CASE STUDY

#### Local NGO partnership experiences from the Nepal earthquake response

The district NGO was established in 2009 with a mandate to address social issues through empowerment. This approach was expanded in 2013 to include community development. In 2014 the NGO had a programme portfolio of approximately Nepalese Rupees (NPR) 1 million (£7,000) and had a staff of approximately 20 people.

After the earthquake, the budget quickly grew to NPR 10 million (£70,000) at the end of 2015 to NPR 250 million in mid-2016 (£1.75 million). It is projected to increase to NPR 350 million (£2.45 million) by the third quarter of 2016. In the same period, the staff size has increased to 250 people.

In order to ensure a level of management oversight a board member took over operational management in the district.

The budget is being funded by five INGO donors and each has different approaches to providing support and use different systems – some more paternalistic than others. The district NGO had pre-existing policies in place to guide financial management, procurement, recruitment and reporting. These have been endorsed by one of the larger INGO donors, which has handed over responsibility for procurement and financial management.

The district NGO has an advisory committee which includes technical support but it also receives technical advice from its INGO partners. It has received training on various aspects of implementation including on quality

standards but capacity building has largely been focused on strengthening compliance.

Most of the INGOs it works with have already undertaken needs assessments and planned their activities and there has been limited scope for it to influence project design. Logical frameworks and budgets are usually already in place by the time they are shared with the NGO and so its job is usually to implement the planned activities. One INGO has recently permitted it to determine programme activities as long as they fit within the broad objectives that have been set.

There is a concern that the INGOs have a lot of staff and suffer from high turnover. This means that they are not always familiar with the district administration, which can be problematic.

Donor budgets include very limited overhead costs which is a challenge given the complexities of the response. No support is provided to sustain the broader organisation or to contribute to core costs as the budget is focused at a project level. There have been instances when projects have been postponed but there was no budget made available to compensate the NGO for local-level costs that it incurred. There are also issues of per diem payments for government monitoring staff which the NGO must pay but which are not reimbursed by the INGO as it is against their policy.



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# List of abbreviations and acronyms

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AIN	Association of International NGOs
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
DDRC	District Disaster Relief Committee
DDRMP	District Disaster Risk Management Plan
DFID	Department for International Development
DLSA	District Lead Support Agency
DPNET	Disaster Preparedness Network
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECHO	European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office
ENPHO	Environmental and Public Health Organisation
ERP	Emergency Response Preparedness
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GoN	Government of Nepal
HAMI	Humanitarian Accountability Monitoring Initiative
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HCT+	Humanitarian Country Team Plus
HRRP	Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LDRMP	Local Disaster Risk Management Plan
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPR	Nepalese Rupees
NRA	National Reconstruction Authority
NRRC	Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium
PDNA	Post-Disaster Needs Assessment
STAIT	Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team
SWC	Social Welfare Council
TA	Transformative Agenda
UMN	United Mission to Nepal
UN	United Nations
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
VDC	Village Development Committee
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

# Glossary of terms

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## Charter for Change

The *Charter for Change* comprises eight recommendations designed to deliver change within the ways of working of international organisations so that southern-based national actors can play an increased and more prominent role in humanitarian response.<sup>5</sup>

## Cluster

A 'cluster' is essentially a sectoral group convened for the purposes of preparing for and responding to disasters or humanitarian crises.

## District and National NGO

A district NGO has representation and operations in one district of Nepal. A national NGO has representation in Kathmandu and which may work in one or more districts of Nepal. In this report the term 'local NGO' will include both district and national NGOs.

## International Organisation

An international organisation is an organisation with an international membership, scope or presence. There are two main types of international organisations: international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) which includes ActionAid, Cafod, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund, and intergovernmental organisations which includes the United Nations (UN).

## Localisation

'Localisation' refers to a series of measures which different constituent parts of the international humanitarian system should adopt in order to rebalance the system more in favour of national actors, so that a recalibrated system works to the relevant strengths of its constituent parts and enhances partnership approaches to humanitarian action.<sup>6</sup>

## Partnership

'Partnership' can be defined as mutually empowering relationships, which are aware of power imbalances and focused on mutual growth, organisational development, institutional strengthening and, above all, achieving impact.<sup>7</sup>

## Preparedness

'Preparedness' refers to the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organisations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from, the impacts of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions.<sup>8</sup>

## Transformative Agenda (TA)

The TA is a set of concrete actions aimed at transforming the way in which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies. It focuses on improving the timeliness and effectiveness of the collective response through stronger leadership, more effective coordination structures, and improved accountability for performance and to affected people.<sup>9</sup>

## Earthquake location and severity map<sup>10</sup>



## Affected districts map<sup>11</sup>



Districts highlighted in orange were visited during the research.



# I. Introduction

Destruction and temporary shelters in the badly-affected village of Basanta, in Tistung VDC, Makwanpur district.

## 1.1 The Nepal earthquake

On 25 April 2015 a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal near the village of Barpak in Gorkha district, 81 kilometres northwest of Kathmandu. It was followed on 12 May by a 7.3 magnitude in the border of Dolakha and Sindhupalchok districts, 76 kilometres northeast of Kathmandu, which toppled already weakened buildings and triggered a number of landslides. The earthquake and aftershocks killed 8,891 people, seriously injured a further 22,303 people and rendered millions homeless. More than 600,000 houses were completely damaged with a further 300,000 partially damaged. Nepal is considered to be vulnerable to a range of natural hazards (see figure 1) and has a history of frequent small- to medium-scale disasters punctuated by larger events; the earthquake was the largest to hit Nepal since 1934.

## 1.2 Background to the research

In the Oxford online dictionary, the definition of ‘opportunity knocks’ is given as ‘a chance of success occurs’<sup>13</sup> and this has been true of partnership in the earthquake response; for the first time in Nepal and for one of the first times in a humanitarian response to a large-scale natural disaster, the international humanitarian community has been united in its early adoption of partnership as the dominant modality to provide relief and recovery. While this is a requirement of the Government of Nepal (GoN) rather than the choice of international humanitarian organisations, it provides an important opportunity to review the extent to which this experiment in collective humanitarian action has been effective and to examine the different approaches that were used to deliver the response. With this study coinciding with a meeting of the world’s most senior

### FIGURE 1 The vulnerability of Nepal to disasters<sup>12</sup>

Nepal has a population of 28 million people and is extremely vulnerable to disasters. A combination of rugged topography, active tectonic processes and intense monsoon rains makes Nepal susceptible to floods, landslides, fires, heatwaves, epidemics and earthquakes. In the Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index for 2016, which was compiled prior to the earthquake, Nepal was ranked 17<sup>th</sup>, indicating a significant level of exposure and vulnerability to extreme events. In the 2014 World Risk Report, Nepal was ranked as a low risk (108<sup>th</sup> out of 171 countries), but its vulnerability and susceptibility, lack of coping capacities and lack of

adaptive capacities were all considered to be high. Ranked 145<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries listed on the Human Development Index, poverty plays an important role in exacerbating the vulnerability of many of Nepal’s population to disasters. Analysis undertaken by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction shows that floods are the most frequent hazard in Nepal, with 50 events reported between 1900 and 2014. Landslides follow this, with 23 events reported in the same period, then epidemics, with 17 events. There have been six earthquake events registered in the database.

## FIGURE 2 Methods and approach

- A comprehensive set of qualitative data-gathering from across the six commissioning agencies of their experiences of working in partnership on humanitarian work
- A web-based document search and literature review which examined the lessons learned from previous preparedness efforts and humanitarian action in Nepal, emerging findings from the earthquake response, and discussion documents on localisation (142 documents)
- Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with:
  - district and national NGOs (34 interviews)
  - international NGOs (34 interviews)
  - UN agencies (8 interviews)
  - government representatives (7 interviews)
  - donor agencies (1 interview).A list of key informants is provided in annex 2.
- A three-week field trip to Nepal which included two trips to the disaster-affected districts of Gorkha (four days) and Sindhupalchok (three days)
- A consultation, feedback and validation workshop in Kathmandu at the end of the research trip (two national and five international NGOs) and in the United Kingdom after the preparation of the draft report.

humanitarians at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), which has an agenda to reshape humanitarian response, it is hoped that its findings will contribute to the growing impetus to 'localise' humanitarian response.

### 1.3 Purpose of the research

This study will complement the previous research, and will seek to strengthen advocacy for the localisation of humanitarian response by analysing the Nepal earthquake response to explore how the humanitarian system can move towards a more collaborative approach between national and international humanitarian organisations in an acute fast-onset crisis.

### 1.4 Methodology

The study was undertaken by an international and a national researcher (Andy Featherstone and Subindra Bogati), and used the methods outlined in figure 2. The terms of reference for the study are reproduced in annex 1.

#### The focus of the research on learning from partners about partnerships

Several high-level reviews of different aspects of the Nepal earthquake response have been undertaken; the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) has conducted

an after-action review, and there has been a review of preparedness actions undertaken by members of the Senior Transformative Agenda (STAIT). There have also been numerous real-time evaluations undertaken by international organisations (including from the five of the six agencies that commissioned this research) but these have tended to focus on the international aspects of the humanitarian response. **This study is different in that it seeks to capture and amplify the perceptions of national responders about partnership performance in the earthquake response and how the international humanitarian system can provide better and more predictable support for disaster response in the future.**

#### Approach to confidentiality

It was agreed that feeding back on sensitive issues linked to the earthquake response or partner performance may be problematic as some participants may be unwilling to go 'on record', which could compromise their participation in, and the findings of, the research. For this reason it was decided that where quotes from interviews are used, attribution would offer a reasonable level of anonymity.

## 2. The role of partnership in earthquake preparedness and response

Community volunteers help prepare materials during an Oxfam distribution of hygiene kits in Sankhu. The kits contain a bucket for clean water, a bar of soap, oral rehydration salts, and towels, helping people meet their basic sanitation needs. Oxfam has also provided the community with emergency latrines to help prevent the outbreak of infectious disease.

### 2.1 The role and readiness of national responders for disaster response

In order to respond to disasters, a planning and preparedness architecture has been developed by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development and is outlined in the 2012 Disaster Risk Management Planning Guidelines. The District Disaster Risk Management Plan (DDRMP) and Local Disaster Risk Management Plan (LDRMP) offer guidance to the district administration and Village Development Committees (VDCs), and provide a template for the establishment of disaster management structures and committees. The challenge has been in operationalising these structures and in maintaining continuity. While in some of the districts that are frequently affected by floods there has been strong support for the

development of LDRMPs by international and district NGOs, in the districts that experience disasters less frequently, including in many of the earthquake-affected districts, while the DDRMPs existed they were often too outdated to be of use.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the government preparedness policies, which in some districts existed more in principle than in practice, there had been considerable international attention given to preparing for disasters, which had led to the establishment of the multi-donor supported Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (see figure 3). In coordination with the NRRC, many of the clusters had also developed sector-specific preparedness plans, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Emergency Response Plan (ERP) had been piloted in Nepal (albeit with a focus on floods rather than an earthquake).

#### FIGURE 3 National disaster preparedness and response initiatives

In May 2009 the Government of Nepal (GoN) launched the comprehensive Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC). The NRRC is a unique institutional arrangement, bringing together financial institutions, development partners, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the UN in partnership with the GoN. It bridges the spectrum of development and humanitarian partners, uniting to support the GoN in developing a long-term action plan to reduce Nepal's vulnerability to disasters. The NRRC has sought to work with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the broader government both to ensure the development of an appropriate policy framework and to build the capacity of

disaster management staff to prepare for, and respond to, potential crises. Flagship 2 of the NRRC seeks to address emergency preparedness and response capacity with a focus on enhancing the GoN's ability to respond effectively to disasters at the national, regional and district levels. This is complemented by Flagship 4, which is a coordination and advocacy mechanism for Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction in Nepal.<sup>15</sup> Together, the two flagships have sought to build the capacity of communities, GoN and disaster responders to withstand and respond to shocks and disaster events.

There can be little doubt that collective preparedness initiatives such as the NRRC have increased awareness of the importance of preparedness, and that the ERP had raised the profile of preparedness. However, feedback during the research suggests that it has been far from easy to maintain momentum in centrally-managed efforts to strengthen disaster risk reduction (DRR) as the political environment has caused 'considerable challenges for rapid, effective and sustained outcomes, causing frustration and challenges for programme and budget frameworks'.<sup>16</sup> This sentiment was echoed in a reflections exercise held after the August 2014 floods in west Nepal, the response for which was described as 'disjointed and slow, despite years of investment in disaster risk management at local and national level'.<sup>17</sup> It was felt that 'an over-engineered system... gave us overconfidence but in fact lacked substance'.<sup>18</sup>

At a local NGO level, knowledge of and engagement in preparedness and contingency planning was mixed, albeit with the majority of national and district NGOs having had limited prior experience either of preparedness planning or of humanitarian response. It is also important to stress that very few of the 14 districts that were affected by the earthquake had suffered humanitarian crises of any scale and as a consequence most had not been targeted for preparedness planning. Sindhupalchok district was one of the exceptions and both local NGO staff and the district administration spoke of the response to the 2014 Jure landslides as an important learning experience.

There were a small number of national NGOs that had joined with INGOs and UN agencies in contingency planning for a potential earthquake in the Kathmandu valley (the preparedness plans and the pre-positioned contingency stocks were used in the earthquake response). There were also a small number of local NGOs that had received basic training and support for the development of organisational response capacity from an INGO partner. This had strengthened understanding and trust between partners, which offered a foundation for humanitarian response after the earthquake.

## 2.2 The initial response

At a national, district and village level it was members of the community, local NGOs and government that mobilised most quickly and jointly to provide the assistance, care and support that was urgently needed. Community members valiantly sought to save lives and get medical assistance to those who were harmed by falling buildings. They were assisted by community organisations and local NGOs, which quickly mobilised to help get people out of collapsed buildings and rubble. The mountainous topography and scattered nature of villages meant that access to medical services was often extremely challenging, but the rapid response by communities to support and assist played an essential part in the initial search and rescue, as a result of which many injured people were taken to hospital immediately and missing people were found alive within days. While there was a shortage of relevant skills, it was the belief

Information board by CARE, partners and donors showing the types of shelters that will withstand an earthquake.





FIGURE 4

### The extension of disaster assistance to members of women's cooperatives

Lumanti, a national NGO partner of ActionAid, Oxfam and Christian Aid, had an ongoing programme in establishing and supporting women's saving and credit cooperatives and had also supported small-scale infrastructure improvement activities. Many of these families were badly affected by the earthquake including several whose homes had been destroyed. Immediately after the earthquake, Lumanti quickly mobilised their staff to support the cooperatives

to undertake a basic survey of the affected families and map the situation. The assessment revealed an immediate need for tarpaulins for shelter, and a need for cash support to purchase medicines and to address the special needs of women and children, as well as for purchasing food and establishing community kitchens. Within days of the earthquake occurring, support had been mobilised for tarpaulins, drinking water, sanitation facilities, food and cash.

in humanity that provided the common bond, and at the grassroots level, local NGOs mobilised irrespective of their mandate in order to provide assistance:

*'We had little institutional experience of humanitarian work...but the immediate response only required an understanding of humanity as time was critical.'*

National NGO staff member

There is significant anecdotal evidence of the importance of the early support provided by responders who themselves had suffered the terrible effects of the earthquake. Two examples, that of a high-capacity national NGO and a grassroots women's leadership organisation, demonstrate the essential assistance that was provided in the immediate aftermath of the disaster (see figures 4 and 5).

#### The international NGO surge<sup>20</sup>

The context of humanitarian response in Nepal that requires international organisations to play a supporting role in humanitarian response likely played a part in the deployment of fewer international staff than in other responses, as did the decision by the IASC to classify the disaster as an L2 response rather than an L3, which would have triggered a far larger international surge.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, teams from some of the more operational and better-funded international NGOs

still expanded significantly, but this tended to be for a comparatively shorter time than in disasters where INGOs were able to respond operationally. However, there were still concerns raised by INGOs and local NGOs about the challenges that they faced trying to support a revolving door of senior humanitarian staff who had little knowledge of the context and were insufficiently appraised of existing programmes and partnership arrangements. This had a negative impact on the speed of the response as new staff started from a low knowledge-base. It also proved frustrating for partner staff who felt that some of their long-established international partners had suddenly become overly paternalistic, as interviews with both international and local organisations highlighted:

*'Our [long-term INGO] partner became a chaotic organisation. Many foreigners came and the INGO's national staff had to spend a long time helping them to understand the context. National programme staff within their organisation were undermined and there was a high turnover [of international staff].'*

National NGO senior staff member

*'Working with partners is not in the genes of our humanitarian surge staff, which is an issue that should be urgently addressed.'*

INGO Country Director

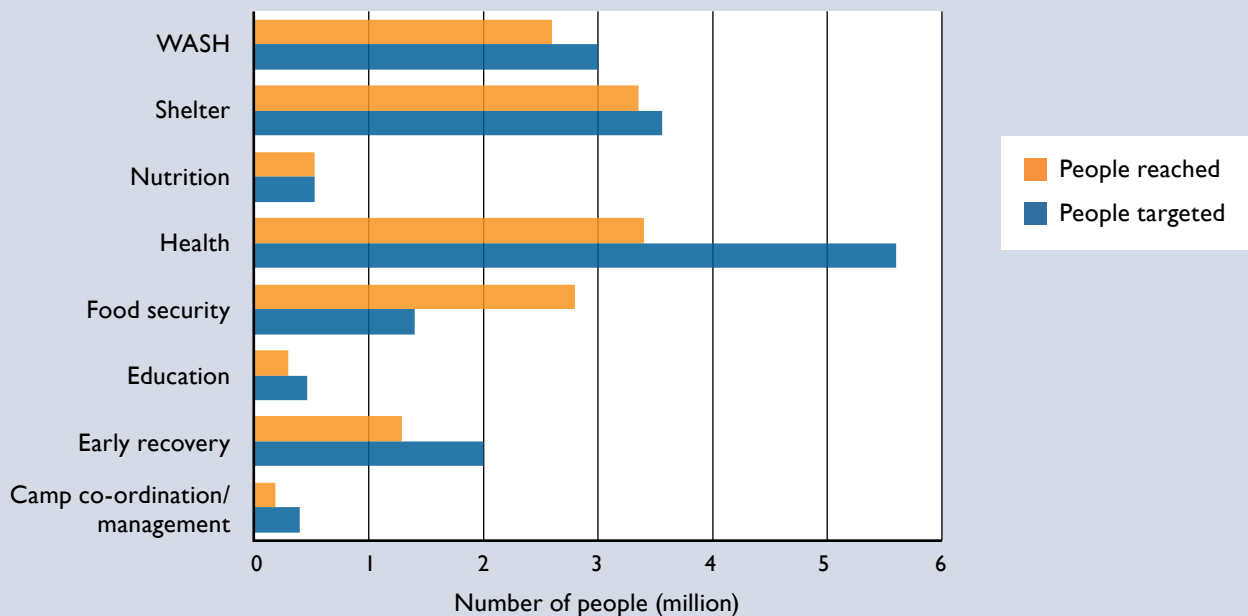
FIGURE 5

### The provision of gender-sensitive assistance after the earthquake

In the days after the earthquake, grassroots women first responders quickly identified that in many communities the particular health needs of women and girls were going unmet. For instance, the lack of basic feminine hygiene supplies puts women and girls at risk. Considering lingering taboos linked to menstruation, displaced women and girls may hesitate to request these supplies from health workers,

despite them being crucial to health and dignity. Local women combated this through distribution of culturally-appropriate sanitary pads for women and adolescent girls. Networks of grassroots women have also mobilised to meet the needs of pregnant and lactating mothers, whom volunteers encountered in community after community, living outdoors and under tarps.<sup>19</sup>

**FIGURE 6**  
**Humanitarian needs and persons reached by sector in the first five months after the earthquake<sup>23</sup>**



The same issues were raised by several INGOs in their real-time evaluations of the response, which highlights the importance of ensuring that surge staff have both a commitment to and a good understanding of the principles of partnership, and that INGO recruitment, inductions and performance evaluations use the principles as a reference.

#### National NGO surge capacity

There is growing recognition of the importance of localising surge responses,<sup>22</sup> but investment in building surge capacity in Nepal has been very limited. Some specialist training had been provided to strengthen search and rescue capacity, but from a local NGO perspective, knowledge and capability was modest. As international organisations flew in additional staff and material for their responses, there was a stark contrast with the resources and expertise that were available to local NGOs. The disparity between national and international resources was frequently commented on, with a commonly-held view that INGOs tended to strengthen their own operations in advance of that of their partners – even in a context where partnership was the dominant response modality. While a large number of local NGOs were able to quickly mobilise staff and volunteers, the lack of formal training in humanitarian response and the limited experience that existed caused a greater requirement for INGO support, which proved a challenge to provide at the same time as scaling up the humanitarian response.

### 2.3 The contribution made by partnership to the effectiveness of the response

The early months of the response were at times chaotic, and relief activities were hampered by the difficult conditions brought by the heavy monsoon rains and landslides as well as the challenging terrain. Despite this, secondary evidence suggests that some of the most urgent humanitarian needs were met. The report of the UN on the achievements of the response five months after the earthquake offers some explanation, suggesting that 3.7 million people out of 5.4 million people in the 14 worst-affected districts were provided with humanitarian assistance. At a cluster level the analysis of achievements against strategic objectives suggests that a significant majority of priority needs were met, particularly in the important sectors of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and shelter (see figure 6).

A survey undertaken towards the end of the relief phase by the Asia Foundation found that among those whose houses were destroyed or uninhabitable, people in wards far from the district headquarters were at least as likely to receive assistance as those who lived closer,<sup>24</sup> which offers an important indication of the coverage of the response.<sup>25</sup> Given that those least accessible to district headquarters often required several days' trekking to reach, this should be considered as no small achievement. In a shelter survey undertaken by the Shelter Cluster and published in November 2015, 77% of respondents reported that they

had received temporary shelter assistance, and in 9 out of the 14 affected districts, over 90% of households with damaged housing were found to have received shelter assistance.<sup>26</sup>

While there were also well-publicised gaps in meeting humanitarian needs, the findings of several different surveys suggest that despite the significant geographic challenges, humanitarian partnerships had successfully met some of the most acute needs. It is no surprise, therefore, that partnership was perceived by INGOs to have strengthened the coverage of the response, with a Thomson-Reuters survey showing that out of 19 INGOs, 10 agreed that partnership had enabled them to reach more people, while only 3 INGOs disagreed (see figure 7).

The same survey highlighted the challenge that partnerships presented to the timeliness of the response, with 9 out of 20 INGOs considering that the additional bureaucracy associated with partnerships had the effect of slowing the response and 8 INGOs disagreeing with the statement. In analysing these results, it is important to stress that the bureaucracy that is referred to was rarely the fault of the local NGO, but was frequently a consequence of the due diligence procedures that INGOs undertook prior to establishing partnership agreements. The delays were often exacerbated by government rules and processes concerning partnerships.

To place these findings in context, it is important to separate the significant number of new partnerships that were brokered for the purposes of the earthquake response from pre-existing partnerships where assessments had already been conducted and trust had already been established. For the latter, there were cases of partnership agreements being quickly extended or old partners being sought out and responsibility being quickly handed over. For the former group, however, the process of undertaking due diligence assessments, capacity assessments, and agreeing support requirements and implementation modalities took time<sup>28</sup> and was dependent on the size of the programme and the level of technical complexity.<sup>29</sup>

*‘Partnership has slowed things down. In the end we had to deliver the winterisation programme operationally in order to deliver it in time. If we had had time to build more [partner] capacity this would have speeded things up.’*

Senior INGO staff member

It is important to add that for some aspects of the response, such as the initial relief distributions, local NGOs often had far greater flexibility than their international counterparts and so made an important contribution to a timely response, albeit very often on a modest scale given the limited resources that were available to them.

**FIGURE 7**  
INGO perceptions of the contribution that partnership made to coverage and timeliness<sup>27</sup>

Do you agree with the following statements?

The requirement to partner with local or national NGOs in the aftermath of the earthquake...



*‘Partners were able to mobilise volunteers very quickly; operational agencies couldn’t do that. It took 2–3 days for us to clarify where our partners were and how we could work.’*

Senior INGO staff member

With these issues in mind, it would be fair to conclude that the effect of partnership on the timeliness of the initial relief response was mixed, but also that the potential exists to address some of the challenges through strengthening INGO partnership preparedness and ensuring that tools to guide new partnerships can be quickly deployed.

## 2.4 Access of local NGOs to humanitarian funding for the earthquake response

From a timeliness perspective, the lack of international donor funding available to local NGOs meant that they were entirely reliant on INGOs to pass funds to them. Interviews failed to identify a local NGO that had received funding directly from an international donor, an issue that has been a recurring theme across the *Missed Opportunities* partnership studies. In both the Philippines and the South Sudan study the findings revealed a dearth of opportunities for local NGOs to directly access funding. In the earthquake response there were two contrasting humanitarian financing trends:

- International NGOs passed a significant proportion of their humanitarian funding to national and district-based NGOs
- International donors passed little or no funding directly to national and district-based NGOs.<sup>30</sup>

There is insufficient information to determine the proportion of funds that was granted directly to local NGOs.<sup>31</sup> However, analysis shows that one month after the earthquake 20% of funds registered on OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service (FTS)<sup>32</sup> had been passed to INGOs. The proportion of this amount that was then passed onto local NGOs would have been considerably smaller.<sup>33</sup>

Humanitarian financing and data on aid flows are issues that both received significant attention at the WHS as part of discussions about a Grand Bargain to increase the efficiency of humanitarian action, which included a commitment to channel 25% of financing to local responders as directly as possible by 2020. A commitment was also made to greater transparency about disbursements, including how much funding is implemented directly by INGOs and how much is implemented by local NGOs. The Thomson-Reuters survey undertaken in Nepal in June 2016 served to endorse the commitment to increasing funding to local NGOs, with 17 out of 19 INGOs that expressed a preference in favour of addressing the imbalance.<sup>34</sup>

Dhan Kumari Adhikari, 32, of Tripureshwor VDC in Dhading district scatters rice seeds in her field, preparing for paddy cultivation in the monsoon which is a couple of weeks away. A housewife and a mother of two, Dhan Kumari received the seeds from Oxfam and its partner, Small Farmers Agriculture Cooperative, during a rice seeds distribution on 27 May 2015 for earthquake-affected people of the region.



## 3. National leadership and coordination of the earthquake response

Local women constituting the women's committee sign to receive aid from ActionAid, which they will distribute.

### 3.1 The role of the Government of Nepal (GoN) in disaster response

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) is the lead government agency for emergency preparedness and response and is responsible for coordinating response across ministries, security forces and humanitarian partners at national and district level. Coordination and information management to support response efforts is undertaken by the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC), based in Kathmandu, which works with District Emergency Operation Centres where these exist. At the district level, the District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) is the responsible authority for coordinating response efforts in respective districts. In support of district-level response, the role of the District Lead Support Agency (DLSA) has been identified to work with DDRCs and humanitarian actors in coordinating response efforts and facilitating information sharing and management, although these do not exist in all districts. Underpinning the disaster management architecture are a series of policy documents that have come into law over the last 35 years (see annex 3).

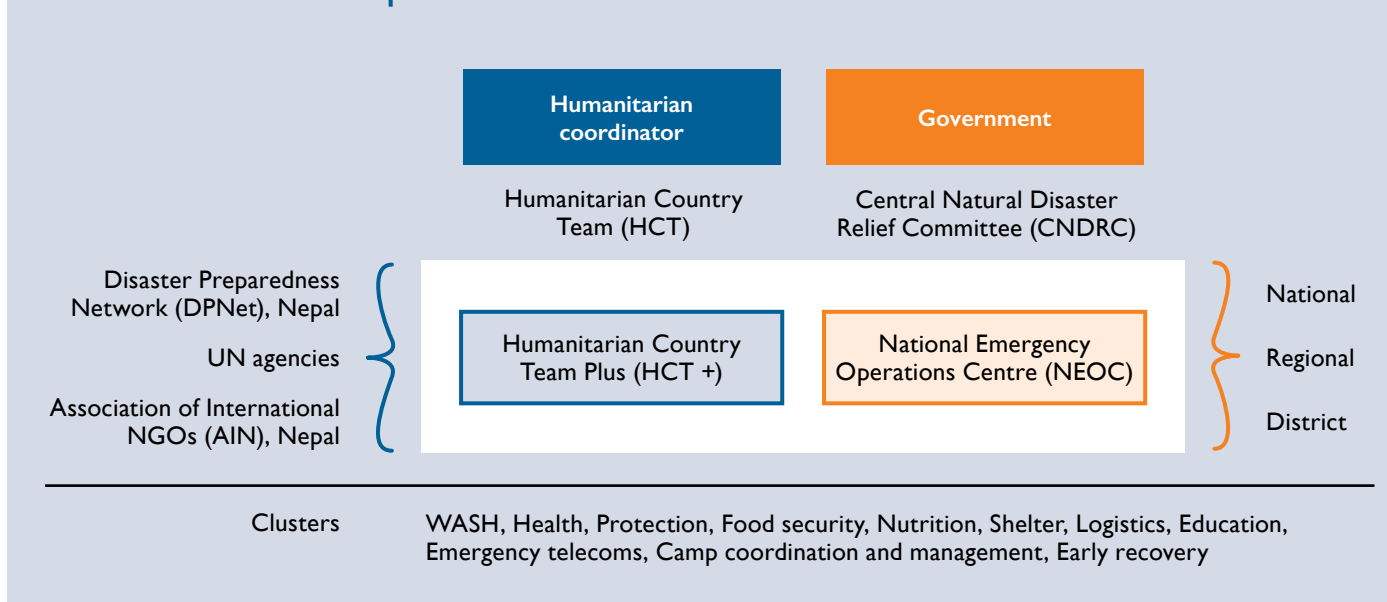
Despite the momentum that has been built up over the years, the key weakness in Nepal's disaster management is the absence of a bill to replace the 1982 Calamity Act. This would, in theory, lead to the establishment of a National Disaster Management Council, that would centralise authority for disaster management and offer an opportunity to update the current provisions, permitting greater coherence in disaster response.

### 3.2 The role of government and participation of local NGOs in humanitarian leadership

In support of a government-led response, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is the strategic and operational decision-making and oversight forum established and led by the Humanitarian Coordinator. After the earthquake, the Humanitarian Country Team Plus (HCT+) was activated, which includes key donors and greater civil society representation to further strengthen coordinating response efforts. Participation in HCT+ of the Association of International NGOs (AIN) provided an additional forum for NGO partners to coordinate and align response efforts. Participation was also elicited from the national NGOs' Disaster Preparedness Network, DPNet, as a representative of Nepal's civil society organisations, although attendance was less frequent and the arrangement lasted only for the duration of the relief response (see figure 8).

From a global perspective, the participation of local NGOs in humanitarian leadership forums such as the HCT is patchy<sup>35</sup> and while efforts are now more frequently made to diversify them, the perception among local NGOs is that this remains tokenistic and rarely achieves desired outcomes – that of offering local civil society a voice in how humanitarian action is led. It is important to note here that achieving an inclusive humanitarian leadership team can be complex due to a lack of representative NGO coordination structures. However, with humanitarian assistance in Nepal being almost entirely undertaken by local NGOs, it is difficult to consider as legitimate an HCT that lacks national NGO representation.

**FIGURE 8**  
**Humanitarian leadership and coordination structure<sup>36</sup>**



After the earthquake, the National Emergency Operations Centre provided oversight of the response and at a district level, humanitarian leadership was provided by the District Disaster Relief Committees which were led by the respective Chief District Officer. While the GoN's Disaster Management Guidelines explain how the Committees should run in theory, in practice the capacity, leadership and awareness of authorities in each district varied as did their interpretation of their role. The frequent turnover of district staff also had a negative impact on continuity and leadership of the response, the effects of which were exacerbated by the different levels of experience that government staff had of disaster management, which was generally limited. Irrespective of district-level capacity, local NGOs frequently had a good understanding of these structures and were able to engage with them.

### 3.3 Participation of government and local NGOs in humanitarian coordination

Despite the inclusion of the clusters in Nepal's National Disaster Response Framework, the lack of previous large-scale response in many of the affected districts, linked to the limited capacity and experience that many local NGOs had of disaster response, meant that familiarity was initially limited. In the early days of the response, concerns were raised about the use of English as the language of coordination, the use of humanitarian jargon and the greater familiarity that international staff had with the clusters, meaning that local NGO staff had limited visibility and were disenfranchised with what many of them perceived as an over-internationalisation of coordination. It also led to operational challenges as Nepali staff struggled to translate some of the

jargon into Nepali for the purposes of working with communities.

*'In the beginning English was used... In the cluster meetings and seminars, we were asked to speak in English and learn in English, and while in community, we had to translate that into Nepali. As most of the words spoken in the cluster meetings and seminars/workshops were pretty new for us, it was hard to find exact translations into Nepali, which is a challenge as we need to use Nepali language in the community.'*

Senior district NGO staff member

From the perspective of a member of a district administration, the initial use of English was a pragmatic decision taken to ensure that INGOs were included in the coordination as they had most of the resources, but it was addressed comparatively quickly with some clusters transitioning to Nepali or using both languages fairly swiftly.<sup>37</sup>

*'There were a large number of international agencies present in the cluster meetings so we had to help them understand. As the immediate assistance came from them, it was important that we made feel them comfortable and we wanted to let them know the sort of problems we were facing – so English was chosen. Once the number of internationals decreased and their immediate help for the affected communities with basic assistance became less important we then started focusing on longer-term planning and switched to the Nepali language.'*

District government official

The clusters were activated at both a national and district level albeit with a focus on three humanitarian ‘hubs’ which covered the 14 affected districts. This mismatch between the regional humanitarian hubs established by the UN and district-level government coordination was short-sighted; and the fact that in most of the districts the government asserted its leadership of the response brought into question the added value of the regional structure, particularly given global efforts within the international humanitarian system to better support national coordination.

### The potential for partnership to strengthen district-level humanitarian coordination

One of the missed opportunities prior to the earthquake had been a failure to get consistent support across districts for the role of the District Lead Support Agency (DLSA), which is mandated to strengthen and support humanitarian leadership. In the Disaster Management Guidelines, the aim of the DLSA is to strengthen ‘coordination between Government and non-Government actors related to disaster preparedness and response initiatives’. Prior to the earthquake, uptake of these roles was limited in the affected districts<sup>38</sup> and there was also a lack of clarity about how the role should support

coordination. Since the earthquake there have been renewed efforts by a number of INGOs to operationalise DLSAs in the affected districts, with some encouraging results (see figure 9).

### 3.4 The challenges posed by government policies on humanitarian assistance

Partnership between the GoN and members of the international humanitarian system was challenged in a couple of key aspects of the response. While the government policy of blanket distributions may have been relevant in the initial weeks after the earthquake, and its ‘one door policy’ had potential to hasten the response through a centralised system of distributions, both policies were considered problematic, particularly once the initial distributions had been completed and the differential impact of the earthquake on different communities and different members within communities became increasingly evident, as a report by Save the Children suggests:

*‘The earthquake occurred in the context of a deeply entrenched social hierarchy, and associated with that hierarchy, deeply entrenched vulnerabilities – with different groups suffering various and often multiple vulnerabilities related to caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, language or geographical remoteness. Unless during the response to disaster these groups are specifically targeted based on an understanding of the context of social exclusion, there is a real risk that vulnerabilities will be exacerbated and social disadvantage further entrenched, resulting in these groups being left even further behind.’<sup>39</sup>*

The blanket approach was based on an assumption that there was sufficient assistance to cover all of the needs, but this was often not the case. As a consequence, some community members failed to receive assistance because they had to travel far to reach distribution sites and by the time they arrived, supplies had been exhausted. At a local level, the aid effort also faced challenges of having to navigate the politicisation of assistance and aid diversion,



A meeting between local leaders and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) about distributions that are taking place in Gorka District.

### FIGURE 9 The potential that exists for NGOs to support preparedness and response

In one of the worst earthquake-affected districts, an established INGO was appointed DLSA two months after the earthquake. One year on, the number of INGOs with a presence in the district has reduced from 110 to 25 and there are 20 local NGOs that are undertaking the majority of the reconstruction activities. There is currently an informal coordination group, with a draft ToR to formalise

the collaboration. Efforts are also being made to strengthen the partnership between the district administration, INGOs and local NGOs to strengthen ways of working and to bridge any gaps that exist. A greater focus is now being placed on DRR, with a view to trying to bring the different actors together into a single DRR working group in order to focus organisational efforts.

which complicated the task of providing impartial assistance.

*‘There is politics everywhere. Even government officials want us to start a project in their district or ask us to partner with CBOs that they have connections to or hire their relatives as staff. Things like this are there all the time.’*

Senior national NGO staff member



Survivors of the earthquake and houses destroyed near the Tibetan Border.

The challenges posed by targeting and inclusion were exacerbated by the limited understanding that some partners and government staff had of humanitarian principles and impartiality in particular, although the earthquake was not the first time that these challenges had been faced.<sup>40</sup> Representation of vulnerable groups in decision-making about assistance is necessary to ensure it is relevant to the particular needs of different groups, but in some areas these groups were excluded from local decision-making bodies, which had significant implications for the exclusivity of the earthquake response.<sup>41</sup>

The level of oversight and the extent to which INGOs sought to defend a principled response depended in large part on the maturity of their partnership and the relationship that INGOs had with the district government. For one INGO, a strict targeting policy was only possible with its existing partner and it initially followed the policy of blanket distributions with its new partners until capacity had been developed to comprehensively assess vulnerability; another INGO that was working solely with new partners refused to compromise, but lost considerable time in negotiating a policy of targeting assistance with district administrations, and in working with their partners to undertake a vulnerability analysis to determine who should benefit from its assistance.

There were several examples of innovative partnerships which drew on local NGO research capacities to monitor the provision of assistance and highlight issues of exclusion. Christian Aid’s partner, the SAMATA Foundation, engaged in an extremely limited way in the relief response, but used its intellectual capacity to investigate discriminatory distribution practices in order to highlight the specific vulnerabilities of Dalit community members, and to advocate for the response to more systematically address these.



## 4. Learning from the response – scaling up partnerships

Earthquake recovery Nepal, one year on – Jiri VDC in Patitar village (ward 6). Laxman B.K. and wife Deepmaya received a cash grant from Christian Aid partner HURADEC, which they used to buy livestock for rearing.

### 4.1 Innovative approaches to retooling pre-existing partnerships for the earthquake response

Despite the limited experience that many local NGOs had of disaster response, there were a number of pre-existing INGO–local NGO partnerships that could be quickly adapted for the purposes of responding to the earthquake. Even when the partner had no experience of humanitarian assistance, the trust that existed permitted a much lighter-touch INGO approach to supporting the response which allowed scale-up to occur relatively swiftly.

*‘We had an old partner that supported an advocacy campaign ten years ago that we met with. They had no humanitarian experience but we worked with them to quickly initiate relief activities and to hand over responsibilities in seven VDCs.’*

Senior INGO staff member

For established partnerships, a few examples were provided of permission being given by the INGO donor to use existing grants flexibly, which was welcomed and facilitated a swift response, but these grants were relatively modest in size and could only support small-scale relief activities.

*‘We had an existing programme [funded by an INGO]. When the earthquake struck, we requested to use the pre-existing funding to buy tarpaulins... within three days they had been procured and distributed through our network.’*

Senior network staff member

For the relatively small number of partners which had been engaged in preparedness planning activities in the

earthquake-affected areas, there was a greater sense of purpose and capacity for response. For one INGO, the preparedness work that they had undertaken with their partners allowed them to start providing much-needed assistance at scale very quickly.

*‘We had been participating in an earthquake preparedness programme for the Kathmandu Valley for several years... We had a standby agreement with water tankering agencies which were able to mobilise on the third day after the earthquake. We also had a high-capacity strategic partner which was among the first responders.’*

INGO staff member responsible for DRR and district coordination

### 4.2 Strategies adopted by INGOs to form and support new partnerships to work at scale

Despite widespread concerns about the threat of a large-scale earthquake, the level of preparedness for partnership at the scale required had not occurred in the affected districts and as a consequence there was significant reliance on new partners to deliver much of the response. Lessons from responses elsewhere have shown that developing new partnerships at the same time as delivering disaster response is extremely challenging, and this was also the case in Nepal. The ability of INGOs to overcome these challenges has been one of the most important success factors in the response, with many of the more operational NGOs having stayed in Nepal only for the early months after the earthquake. The challenge posed by the predilection for INGO operationality was frequently commented on:

*'If these decisions are left to the operational managers, they will most likely always go operational, as that is what they know and what they do! Rather than seeing the question as "do we go operational or not?" alternatives such as going operational just for the immediate relief phase should be considered. In the case of Nepal, the opportunity to build significant long-term local/national disaster response capacity across a number of long-term partners has in some cases been sacrificed for more direct involvement in a very limited number of VDCs through new partners.'*

Senior INGO staff member

One year on, the number of international organisations in one of the worst-hit districts had been reduced by three-quarters leaving only those with a long-term commitment to working there. In comparison with similar disasters in Haiti or the Philippines, which have been defined by a large and often unwieldy number of INGOs, some of those interviewed considered the reduction in the number of INGOs to be a positive outcome.

For the organisations that have a commitment to partnership, the Nepal response offered an opportunity to put their principles into practice, which yielded some

very enterprising results. While each organisation had its own approach to scaling up its partnerships, four broad strategies were observed which were either used alone or in parallel (see figure 10).

Within these four generalised approaches, there were some specific examples that are worthy of more detailed elaboration as they were from organisations which in similar situations would have chosen to deliver a far greater proportion of their programme operationally. As a consequence, they have the potential to offer a template for adopting similar partnership approaches in the future, which could be selected in place of an operational response (see the case study on page vi of the executive summary and case study 1 opposite). Also of interest to this study is an example of a partner-led NGO that has had programmes in Nepal for many years, but that had not previously had an operational presence in the country (see case study 2).

For each of the three organisations, the earthquake response represents a significant departure from their normal approach and for this reason there is the potential for lessons from the experience to inform responses in the future – with a particular emphasis on delivering at scale in partnership.

**FIGURE 10**  
Strategies adopted to develop new partners or scale up existing partnerships

Strategy	INGO leadership of local NGO operations	Accompaniment	INGO responsible for key deliverables	Phased handover of responsibilities
<b>Management and support functions</b>	Senior INGO staff member embedded with the partner to lead project delivery and capacity building	Senior INGO staff members embedded into partner to back-stop project delivery and support capacity building	INGO had direct responsibility for specific functions such as procurement, financial management and reporting	Most INGOs adopted a sliding scale of operability and/or budgetary delegation with handover occurring over a period of 3 to 12 months
<b>Field operations</b>	INGO staff members deployed into partner to manage core functions and technical staff at district level	INGO staff members accompanied the team in a support/observer capacity	INGO maintained an independent field presence to lead on complex issues such as targeting and humanitarian accountability	INGO field staff moved from leading local NGO teams, to working with teams in the field, to providing technical advice on complex issues while based in district offices
<b>Strengths</b>	In the early response this strategy may have been appropriate in order to meet the humanitarian imperative	Where INGO staff had capacity-development skills, this approach was welcomed by local NGOs. Gaps could be mutually identified and targeted support could be provided	This strategy reduced the level of risk and the complexity of operations and was particularly targeted at new partners. Support with procurement and financial management was generally welcomed	A clear timeline for handover of functions would have been helpful but was rarely the case. The response potentially offers a model that can be applied elsewhere
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Local NGOs were effectively co-opted by INGOs	This was frequently considered overly paternalistic and inefficient as INGOs often duplicated local NGO staff roles	INGO oversight of field operations made some local NGOs feel that there was a lack of trust	There was a general concern that it took far too long for most INGOs to hand over responsibilities to local NGOs

### CASE STUDY 1

#### Operational INGO approach to scaling up humanitarian partnerships

The INGO has a programme of over £30 million for the earthquake response and although it has supported partners in Nepal for 15 years in other districts, it did not have an operational presence in the earthquake-response districts prior to the earthquake.

After establishing a presence in the earthquake-affected districts, the INGO started to look for partners in July 2015 and, given the limited capacity and the politicisation of partners, it adopted a strategy of selecting between four and five partners for each sector of response. It was felt that this would offer the best coverage for the initial scale-up in anticipation that the number of partners would reduce with time. As part of its partner capacity assessment, the INGO adopted an innovative approach to assessing the potential that existed for working collaboratively, which sought to match an assessment of support needs with the local NGO's willingness to receive support (see figure below). This provided the basis for an honest conversation about capacity gaps and how best to ensure that these could be filled.

In the early months after the response, the INGO recruited its own staff to mirror key partner posts and had one technical staff member for each technical specialism who worked alongside the partner. A similar approach was taken for the support functions of logistics, finance, and monitoring and evaluation. In agreeing this approach, Nepal was considered to be an exceptional case and the partnership modalities reflected the need to deliver significant volume and complexity of programmes with new partners.

In its approach to capacity building, the INGO implemented a 70:20:10 approach which aimed for 70% of the skills to be learned through 'on the job' training, 20% to be provided

through mentoring and coaching by the sector coordinators and programme managers, and 10% of the capacity to be developed through classroom-based training. Local NGO performance was formally assessed every six months, at which time there was an opportunity for it to feed back on the performance of the INGO. Informal assessment occurred on a monthly basis as part of the 'on the job' support that was provided.

Experience in implementing the model has shown that it takes up to four months for partners to establish a good understanding of the general ways of working, and up to a year to be confident with the financial and procurement procedures. That said, these responsibilities were handed over to partners at a fairly early stage albeit with direct support from the INGO team.

	Need	Does not need
Want	NGO requires support and is willing to receive it	NGO has capacity but wants targeted support
Does not want	NGO requires support but does not want it	NGO has capacity and is confident in its delivery capacity

### CASE STUDY 2

#### Partner-led INGO approach to scaling up partnerships

The INGO is non-operational and has had partnerships with local NGOs in Nepal for many years, but did not previously have an operational presence in the country. It has a budget of less than £10 million for the earthquake response.

Because of the comparatively large scale of the funding that was raised for the response and due to the limited capacity and reach of its local partners, the INGO established an office in the country. In an unprecedented step, it also deployed a further four programme officers and three technical staff (in shelter/logistics, finance/cash and resilience) as part of a ten-person team in Nepal.

In its initial strategy the INGO focused on working through a basket of local NGOs, but the number reduced with time and as capacity for programme implementation was strengthened. While capacity building has historically been provided by the INGO to humanitarian partners through very short-term staff deployments, it was agreed that a

dedicated programme officer would accompany each of the partners for a period of three months in order to initially oversee operations and then to take responsibility for capacity development. The focus of the accompaniments was to provide managerial oversight, to support relief distributions and to strengthen adherence to quality standards. Responsibility for programme development was handled in a similar way, with the INGO taking responsibility for programmes over the first four months and responsibility for the subsequent 18 months shifting over to the partner, with programme development being a shared responsibility.

One of the important elements of being able to trial this approach and work at such a scale with new partners has been having flexible funding that has permitted capacity development to be targeted at areas where it is most needed, as well as offering flexibility to deploy additional staff to support partners.



Earthquake recovery Nepal, one year on. Talima Jirel, aged 70, is a widow. She has three daughters, and lives and works in Kathmandu. She received a cash grant from Christian Aid partner HURADEC and bought two goats for rearing.

### 4.3 Local NGO experiences of scaling up their operations

While identifying local partners that were able to respond and supporting them to deliver humanitarian response was difficult for many INGOs, there were associated challenges for local NGOs in managing the diverse partnership requirements of INGOs. During the research, analysis was undertaken of the growth in local NGO

staffing and budgetary responsibility before and after the earthquake response, which reveals the significant scale of the expansion that many local NGOs have undergone (see figure 11).

The findings suggest that it has tended to be district NGOs which have expanded the most, largely as a consequence of INGOs being steered by the government towards partnering with NGOs that were based in the

**FIGURE 11**  
Change in local NGO budget and staffing since the earthquake response<sup>42</sup>

Type of NGO	Existing/new partner	Location of NGO	Expansion since the earthquake response	
			Budget increase	Staff increase
District NGO	New partner	Gorkha	600%	400%
	New partner	Gorkha	3,500%	30%
	New partner	Gorkha	800%	600%
	New partner	Sindhupalchok	1000%	200%
	Existing partner	Sindhupalchok	500%	200%
National NGO	Existing partner	Kathmandu	350%	200%
	Existing partner	Kathmandu	120%	125%
	Existing partner	Kathmandu	500%	300%

affected areas. It is noteworthy that in each case, budget increases have outstripped staffing increases, which raises potential concerns about implementation capacity. Higher-capacity NGOs often expanded more modestly than some of their smaller or more youthful counterparts, and there were a few cases where local NGOs had refused funding or sought to direct it towards longer-term needs.

*‘Though we did work on immediate response using a blanket approach with the support of INGOs, we did not take more money. We knew the districts, and we knew the needs of the people. So we took those things to the people and then we stopped. What we said to our funders was to keep the money safe, so we can use it to solve the long-term problems of the community. Some did as we suggested, but some gave that money to others.’*

Senior national NGO staff member

For some local NGOs the use of such large funds over such a short time was considered reckless, and the focus on ‘burn rates’ was difficult to reconcile with the community development approach that they were familiar with.

*‘They [INGOs] want us to spend and spend, so that they can get more money for other projects or something else. As we believe in community sustainability, we really cannot spend money. We need to spend money in a particular time, not in a haphazard way. They argue that if we spend more money, they can make the existing project two or three times bigger. The problem is that there is no scope for that in the communities we work in.’*

Senior national NGO staff member

However, despite some complaints, most local NGOs accepted the funding that was offered, which has led to a significant shift in the scale and focus of NGO operations in the earthquake-affected areas. The process of scale-up, including the challenges that local NGOs have faced and the implications these have had on their operations, are highlighted in three case studies: two of district NGOs and one of a national NGO (see the case study in the executive summary on page vi and case studies 3 and 4 below). The challenges associated with supporting partnership performance are discussed in more detail in section 5.

Above other considerations, there is now an important need for INGOs to support and nurture the capacity that has been developed if it is to be sustained over the long term and is to provide a safety net for the future. While a Darwinian approach to NGO survival would see those that are most fit for purpose being able to sustain themselves, there is also a responsibility for INGOs to be clear about the nature of their engagement with their partners.

### CASE STUDY 3

#### National NGO approach to scaling up its humanitarian operations

The national NGO was established in 1994 and has a multi-sector urban focus. It started to receive INGO funding in 1996. It had engaged in some DRR activities in 2000 that were incorporated into its mandate in 2009, by which time it was working with several different donors. This experience laid the foundation for its partnerships after the earthquake.

Its initial response was modest in size but swift and focused on its constituents, who undertook assessments that identified food and shelter as the priority needs, which it purchased using its own resources. It also provided a small cash grant.

Within days of the earthquake the NGO began to receive requests from its INGO partners and has worked with six of them in the relief and reconstruction phases. While it is a strategic partner of one of the INGOs, the INGO and the NGO had difficulties working together during the response, because there were so many new staff who knew little of the context. The NGO was requested to prepare a proposal but

this was subject to many changes and delays. Even though it is a strategic partner, some of the due diligence requests that the NGO has received have been extremely disruptive and difficult to meet.

Very few INGO donors elicit the opinion of the NGO in designing projects. Decision-making about projects has, at times, also lacked transparency and on one occasion an INGO closed a relief programme with just two days’ notice, despite 25 staff being engaged on it and community members relying on the assistance it was providing. It took significant lobbying for the decision to be overturned. The NGO has only been able to influence project decisions for one donor, as a consequence of which the relevance of the project was strengthened.

Only one of the NGO’s donors has provided a budget for core costs, which is a challenge. The NGO has decided not to work with at least one INGO because the budget is too tight to cover costs.

#### CASE STUDY 4

#### District NGO approach to scaling up its humanitarian operations

The district NGO was established in 1992, works across a range of development issues and received funding from three donors prior to the earthquake with a portfolio of NPR 10 million (£70,000) and a staff of 45 people. Since the earthquake, at least five new donors have provided funding for a range of technical humanitarian interventions. The budget has increased to NPR 150 million (£1.05 million) and the number of staff has increased to 90.

The NGO focused on shelter because 90% of the houses were damaged in the VDC. Although it had some experience of humanitarian response, it had not worked on a disaster of this magnitude and so its staff were 'learning by doing'. Training has been provided on a range of thematic issues. As projects are generally short term and there is a need to rotate staff from one project to another, there is a constant need for more training. Training has been conducted on management, gender, social mobilisation, and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, which has been very helpful. Although the organisation and budget have grown significantly, INGO donors have not supported institutional growth and expect the NGO to use its own resources for this.

The NGO has found that INGOs work in different ways; some provide laptops, some provide tables, others provide both or neither. For some there is a need to obtain their approval even to buy stationery items. Overheads rarely receive funding.

The NGO has lost eight staff to UN agencies and INGOs, but not to its donors. INGOs and UN agencies pay more money and so they attract the best staff. There is already a dearth of people to work for local NGOs; as they are unable to match INGO salaries, they have had to reduce expectations about the experience and qualifications of the applicants.

With a couple of INGO donors, the NGO proposes activities and works jointly on the budget, which has helped build confidence and trust. However, INGOs are considered to have their own ways of working and there is often a need for compromise.

The district NGO would like to receive institutional support from its INGO partners but currently receives little. The NGO staff feel that the NGO is working as a contractor and they are concerned about the future of the partnership.

## 5. Learning from the response – partnership performance

Master mason Hari Bahadur Bhandari works on-site converting the temporary learning centre at Shree Indrayani Lower Secondary School into an earthquake-proof classroom at Pida-I, Dhading District. Hari received mason training through Tearfund partner UMN.

### 5.1 Addressing the implications of scaling up partnerships – the capacity-building dilemma

Prior to the earthquake most INGOs worked with a small number of local NGO partners, and provided variable levels of support for both operational or project-level capacity building and strategic or organisational-level capacity development. Many partnerships were long-term in nature and had benefited from considerable investment and trust-building. The need to rapidly scale up existing partnerships and develop new ones challenged this model of capacity development over time, and required acquisition of skills at the same time as assistance was delivered. The innovative approaches used by INGOs to strengthen national capacity early in the response were welcomed by local NGOs, but as their knowledge and capability increased over time, the added value of this diminished.

Aside from learning-by-doing, the approach that was most frequently used to strengthen capacity was classroom-based training on a range of humanitarian delivery and project support issues, which has gone a significant way to building up a cadre of national humanitarian staff who have a far greater understanding of project delivery issues.

*‘INGOs do provide trainings on different thematic issues. As projects are not that long and we need to keep rotating our staff from one project to another, we need trainings constantly... In the villages, people ask us so many questions believing that our staff are experts on this so we do need specific in-depth trainings.’*

Senior district NGO staff member

It was on issues such as the Sphere standards, the Core Humanitarian Standards and programme quality more generally that INGOs’ experience and training was particularly appreciated. However, there was some concern expressed that capacity building tended to focus on staff knowledge as opposed to offering financial management support or the assets that were required to deliver projects. A lack of laptops, a dearth of vehicles and limited support to purchase generators were all raised as obstacles to local NGO programme implementation.

*‘After growing to 175 staff [a 300% increase in staffing] we incurred so many unforeseen expenses. However, there are no overhead costs budgeted in the projects we are currently involved in. There is no support for the organisation and we receive minimal management costs.’*

Senior national NGO staff member

*‘Though our budget size is big, INGOs do not provide support for our institutional growth. In a 100 million Rupees project, they do not even allow four laptops for us. They expect us to use our existing resources.’*

Senior district NGO staff member

However, of greater concern from a capacity-development perspective was the limited investment that had been made at a strategic or organisational level. While it may have been difficult for INGOs to justify this investment in the weeks and months immediately following the earthquake, given the expansion that most local NGOs have had to accommodate in order to respond in a proportionate way this would appear to be short-sighted. When local NGOs were asked to list which INGO donors had included support for core costs in their budgets or had gone beyond project-level capacity

building, there were very few that had done so (and it tended to be the same one INGO that had provided strategic capacity building).

*'We do need institutional support from INGOs but we have not got much. We are just working as a contractor. The earthquake response might go on for a couple of years more but once the work is done in this area, then what is next for us? That is the question.'*

Senior district NGO staff member

The potential that organisational capacity development can offer is highlighted by an example from a Tearfund partner, the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), whose investment in capacity development of its partners in Dhading district has offered an opportunity to scale up the humanitarian response in one of the earthquake-affected districts (see case study 5).

A year after the response started, INGO attitudes towards strategic capacity development are changing – albeit with mixed motives. For some, there has been a recognition that a focus at the project level offers little sustainability as some of the larger INGOs have become locked into a repetitive series of training in order to accommodate the rapid staff turnover that some local NGOs have suffered. A shift in focus to the provision of strategic support to the organisation has the potential to address some of the root causes of the turnover. For other INGOs, the move from relief to recovery has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of partners, which has permitted a longer-term and more strategic approach to capacity development. At a minimum, INGOs should be more willing to disclose their ambitions for their partnerships with local NGOs – be it a project-based or strategic partnership – at as early a stage as is possible; at least this would enable the partner to weigh up the potential value to them of the partnership and to make informed decisions about which organisation they wish to work with.

## 5.2 The issue of equity

The limited attention that has been paid to organisational capacity development has been brought into sharper focus by the perception that INGOs have prioritised investment in their own capacity over that of their partners. While this may be defensible in a more traditional context of large operational INGO programmes delivered alongside smaller partner-led programmes, it is more problematic in the context of Nepal where the majority of programmes are being delivered by partners, with INGOs playing an oversight role. In this context, the inequities apparent in how INGOs remunerate their staff and how they equip and staff their offices has caused a level of frustration within some local NGOs.

*'Local NGO salaries are meagre compared to what INGOs are offering for the same sort of staff job.<sup>44</sup> Just because we are local organisations they think that we do not need competitive salaries. Our project staff do not have insurance whereas INGOs do. INGOs travel in very good cars and we walk on foot... We do talk about these things in the DDRC meetings and other clusters and forums. However, sometimes we cannot speak our minds as we need to be careful thinking about the people in the room.'*

Senior district NGO staff member

*'An INGO worked with us on one project, and they opened their office nearby our office. And they had equal number of staff. At that time, they had only one project, that is with us. Later we complained about it time and again, and they reduced their staff and increased ours. If they remain in the district and keep duplicating what we have been doing, then we are not going to learn anything at all. I think their role should be more mentoring and monitoring than implementing projects like us.'*

Senior national NGO staff member

In the early days after the earthquake when INGOs were grappling with the issue of scaling up programmes

### CASE STUDY 5

#### The benefits of organisational capacity building in Dhading district<sup>43</sup>

Prior to the earthquake, United Mission to Nepal's focus in Dhading district had been on capacity building local grassroots organisations, technically and organisationally. The effectiveness of this approach was manifest in this disaster situation as the partners were not only able to play a key role in partnership with UMN, but many also partnered with other INGOs and relief agencies who joined the response. The focus that UMN had had on focusing capacity building at the organisational level in the long term enabled it to rapidly scale up its work, and

ensured it had systems in place to cope with the rapid expansion of its staff and budget. UMN's contribution was, therefore, not just the work it did in the aftermath of the disaster, but also the work that its partners were able to do with others because of the capacity that had been built over many years. While other agencies felt constrained by government regulations to work with local partners, UMN felt that its experience was a strength of its response.



at the same time as they were seeking to form new partnerships, the disparities could more easily be justified, but 12 months later it is becoming more difficult to do so. There were a number of other related issues raised which are discussed in figure 12.

The issue of equity was raised by almost all of the local NGOs that participated in the study. While the research recognises the significant challenges and risks that delivery at scale poses for INGOs, there would be value in INGOs challenging themselves about the comparative investments that have been made in supporting their own teams versus those of their implementing partners. While for the Nepal response solutions are beginning to be explored – which is encouraging – looking beyond Nepal it would be beneficial for INGOs to systematically review their partnership practice with a view to finding solutions to some of the challenges that partners have had to negotiate in the earthquake response.

## 5.3 The complexities of shared partnerships

Post-earthquake there has been a growth of district NGOs with multi-million-pound earthquake response project portfolios. Interviews revealed that these portfolios are frequently comprised of a number of individual INGO-funded projects and that the onus is placed on the local NGO to accommodate project approaches and business practices of several INGOs, which was considered to be a significant challenge. Furthermore, while each individual INGO was aware of the budget for their own project partnerships, they were rarely aware of the total sum of all the projects their partners had responsibility for. Some of the management challenges that local NGOs faced as a result of these partnerships included the need to use different accounting procedures for different INGOs, the need to comply with different reporting requirements and the differential nature of support and oversight.

### FIGURE 12 Poor partnership practice

#### Short project MoUs which make government relations and staff retention challenging

INGOs and national NGOs have a requirement to submit annual plans to the Social Welfare Council (SWC) of Nepal. There were concerns raised by INGOs about the challenges that this presented, yet they frequently subject their local partners to short-term (four-month and six-month) projects, which means that they are unable to meet SWC's planning requirements. The short duration of MoUs also makes it a challenge to recruit and retain good staff, and can have budgetary implications as there are often breaks between project contracts that INGOs have not been willing to provide bridging funds for. Very few partners felt sufficiently empowered to reject short-term MoUs from their international partners.

#### Weighing up the costs and benefits of partner staff movements to international organisations

While the flight of partner staff to INGOs did not occur to the extent that it often does, there was still considerable movement with several partners noting that a handful of staff members had moved to international organisations and, in a few cases, to their INGO donors (one national NGO spoke of losing four staff, another lost eight staff, and one district NGO partner staff member became their INGO donor's district representative). These staff movements were considered to offer benefits to the local NGOs as well as presenting challenges, as they increased knowledge of the partner within the INGO and vice versa. Several local NGO staff also considered that it provided them with an ally in the INGO. Many local NGO staff considered it part of the process of career development, despite it adversely affecting the capacity of their organisations.

#### A lack of consistency in budgeting for project activities and implications for partner staffing

A frequently raised concern was the variability in INGO project funding, which meant that budget lines such as staff salaries often changed from project to project even in the context of a single partnership. This was reportedly due to disparities between INGO donor budgets, which were passed onto the local NGO rather than being absorbed by the INGO. This meant that partner staff were frequently remunerated differently for undertaking the same roles. In a few cases it meant that staff had their salaries changed to accommodate budget variations despite their roles being unchanged, which has understandably caused some resentment and has been challenging for local NGOs to manage internally.

#### The limited scope available for partners to influence project design and budgeting

In the first 12 months of the response, many local NGOs have had very little scope to influence project design or budgets. One of the most frequently-cited concerns was that local NGOs were often responsible for delivering programmes they did not design and that they did not always consider relevant, and received criticism from community members as a consequence. In recent months this has begun to change, with a handful being provided with a budget ceiling and an overall project objective within which there was greater flexibility. A small minority of mainly smaller, local NGOs spoke of having greater potential to work across one of several prescribed sectors and of participating jointly with INGO staff in vulnerability analysis, which offered them greater opportunity to determine needs and to design relevant responses.

It is important to note that the responsibility for taking on such challenging funding portfolios rests with local NGOs, and there were efforts made by some INGOs to ‘protect’ their strategic partners; one INGO staff member spoke of the efforts he had made to avoid burdening a strategic partner with a large budget only to have it to accept significant funding from other INGOs. Irrespective of where responsibility lies, there is certainly the potential for INGOs to coordinate better between themselves in order to ensure that where partners are being jointly funded, efforts are made to reduce the administrative burdens as well as to adopt a collective approach to provide support and capacity development. While interviews with INGOs suggested that collaboration occasionally existed at an informal level, the experience in Nepal suggests that establishing more formal collaboration should become a priority in terms of ensuring project delivery, and also in order to better support and sustain the partner.

#### 5.4 The challenges posed by the politicisation of local NGOs

In the heavily politicised environment surrounding the provision of aid, the political affiliations of many local NGOs proved a significant encumbrance to the provision of assistance. There were examples given

during the research of communities that rejected assistance because of perceived political allegiances of the NGO that was providing it.

*‘The political affiliations of [local] NGOs was a challenge. We selected NGOs on merit but then found that they were all affiliated to the same political party and so there was a perception that our assistance was partisan... we should have been more politically savvy.’*

Senior INGO staff member

The politicisation of local NGOs was difficult to reconcile with the core humanitarian principle of neutrality that underpins the provision of humanitarian assistance. Some INGOs sought to navigate their way around these challenges by working with a range of NGOs with different political affiliations, while others who selected partners entirely on their merit complained that they were then accused of partiality when it became apparent that all of their partners were affiliated with the same political party. In such circumstances, there is a need for INGOs to become politically savvy in order to preserve their neutrality. Ultimately, however, the failure of many local NGOs to extricate themselves from the local political context served to complicate the provision of assistance.

**FIGURE 13**  
Assessment of Nepal partnerships against key commitments in the Charter for Change

#	Description of commitment	Assessment of performance based on the research findings	Performance rating
1	Increase direct funding to southern-based NGOs for humanitarian action	An unprecedented proportion of funding was passed through INGOs to local NGOs. However, very little funding was passed to NGOs either directly or through pooled funding modalities.	MODERATE
4	Stop undermining local capacity	The findings of the research suggest that far fewer local NGO staff were recruited into INGO staff than often occurs in crises of similar magnitude, although the government requirement for the prioritisation of partnerships also meant that many INGOs did not scale up to the same extent as they would usually do.	GOOD
6	Address subcontracting	The scale of the response delivered through partnerships and the lack of humanitarian experience of many partners meant that a subcontracting approach was adopted by many organisations. Partner-led INGOs with smaller budgets tended to establish stronger partnerships.	MODERATE/ POOR
7	Provide robust organisational support and capacity strengthening	With only a few exceptions, organisational support over the first 12 months has tended to focus at the project level with an increase in strategic capacity building in a few cases in recent months.	MODERATE
8	Communication to the media and the public about partners	Performance was mixed, with an equal number of INGO communications acknowledging and failing to acknowledge that assistance was delivered by partners. For relief distributions, there were frequent concerns that it was the INGO name that was printed on items that were being distributed by their partners.	MODERATE



Kalpana Nepal, 30, uses the tap in the newly-repaired gravity-fed water system in Bahungaun village, Agra-7, Makwanpur district.

## 5.5 How did partnerships in the Nepal earthquake measure up to the Charter for Change?

The Charter for Change is an initiative led by both national and international NGOs to practically implement changes to the way the humanitarian system operates to enable a more locally-led response. It comprises eight commitments which international NGO signatories commit to implement in full by May 2018.<sup>45</sup> The success of the localisation agenda which the Charter champions was one of the most significant outcomes of the WHS, with a commitment made across almost the entire sector to channel 25% of humanitarian spend through national organisations by 2020.<sup>46</sup> This important milestone will place partnership at the forefront of humanitarian action and also offers an important tool for this research to use to examine partnership performance in the Nepal response.

In the table in figure 13 the most relevant of the Charter for Change commitments are listed alongside an assessment of the key findings of the research and a performance rating (strong, good, moderate, poor or weak).

In undertaking the assessment, it is important to acknowledge that the context of partnership in the earthquake response provided good practice (a significant amount of INGO funds passed to partners) but may have also exacerbated bad partnership practice

(a predilection for subcontracting, particularly early on in the response). What is clear, however, is that there is still work to do to improve INGO performance, and the real challenge will be how the international humanitarian system reacts to the next large-scale disaster when there is no government stipulation to work in partnership – based on the discussions during the WHS and the findings of this research, the argument for operationality being the default response is beginning to lose considerable ground.

## 5.6 Where next for partnership? Identifying the added value and role of INGOs

The *Missed Opportunities* study series has documented changes in INGO partnership practices over the last three years, during which time significant progress has been made in recognising the value of national response capacity. With the inclusion in the Grand Bargain of a donor commitment to provide direct funding to local NGOs and the launch of the NEAR network (Network for Empowered Aid Response), a global network of southern NGOs,<sup>47</sup> the policy and practice landscape is rapidly changing. In placing far greater responsibility to lead and deliver humanitarian assistance in the hands of local actors, it could be argued that the earthquake response was a reaction to these shifts, but this is not strictly true as the pre-eminence of partnership was as much a consequence of government policy as it was INGO preference. That said, it does offer a very timely

insight into how humanitarian organisations need to change to better respond to and accommodate the much-needed changes in the humanitarian system.

In the Nepal response, there were some important partnership successes that were the product of many years of nurturing, while many others were developed only after the earthquake had struck. For the longer-term partnerships, INGOs have brought knowledge, training and ambition, which permitted local NGOs to scale up more quickly and to work more effectively with their international partners. For newer partnerships, which were often more project-based, INGOs were frequently little more than funding intermediaries – albeit with the potential to strengthen relationships and capacity for the future.

So what needs to change? Fundamentally, there is a need to close the gap between rhetoric and reality with a view to INGOs more consistently reinforcing rather than replacing local NGO capacity – as outlined in a policy paper produced by a member of the NEAR network, Adeso Africa:<sup>48</sup>

*‘The current humanitarian architecture invests very little in the sustainable capacity building of local actors, a factor which is driving an escalating culture of dependency on INGOs and other international agencies. These actors in turn often sideline local actors, treating local NGOs as subcontractors rather than partners. This capacity shortfall limits the effectiveness of first responders in the immediate wake of disasters, reconstruction or recovery efforts and isolates them from policy and planning dialogue in which critical decisions that affect them as well as affected communities are taken.’*

While some positive changes have occurred over time in Nepal, it has taken too long. There needs to be a far greater emphasis placed by the international humanitarian system on identifying partners and investing in capacity development for surge and response in advance of crises. This will require a broader and deeper level of engagement with local NGOs outside of disaster response with a view to reducing the need for support when crises occur. Organisational development needs far greater prioritisation, and investment should be targeted towards working with NGOs to ensure financial management

and procurement procedures are attuned to the needs of international donors and HR policies are in place that can attract and retain high-quality staff. INGOs must provide their partners with adequate funding for support costs in addition to project costs. The same emphasis that has been placed on INGO organisational capacity strengthening in the past must now be refocused at the local level. While some NGOs in Nepal had received some of this support, it has been provided in a piecemeal way and has been limited in its scope.

To strengthen local response, INGOs need to be better facilitators and should place a greater emphasis on staff with softer negotiation skills and capacity development capabilities. The models of contracting that proliferated during the earthquake response need to be replaced by partnership that draws to a far greater extent on the capacities that exist within local NGOs. While this was a challenge in the earthquake response due to the need to rapidly scale up new partnerships, a greater focus on investing in partnerships for response prior to the earthquake would have undoubtedly permitted a smoother scale-up and one that placed greater responsibility in the hands of local actors.

Importantly, INGOs need to have more flexibility in their approach to partnerships in order to identify strengths and weaknesses more quickly and provide targeted support. This will offer the greatest possibility for efficiencies to be achieved through partnership, while ensuring the delivery of programmes that meet quality standards and donor reporting requirements.

Ultimately, however, operational INGOs need to choose partnership over direct implementation and will need to recalibrate their approaches accordingly. One of the concerns that was most often raised in the earthquake response was that despite the supporting role they were playing, INGOs were prioritising investment in themselves above their local NGO implementing partners. This concern is also true at a global level, and it will only be in redirecting some of this investment toward building local capacity for disaster response that a much-needed shift in power will be possible.



Tom Price / Redfund

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Masons convert the temporary learning centre at Shree Indrayani Lower Secondary School into an earthquake-proof classroom at Pida-I, Dhading District.

### 6.1 From ‘missed opportunities’ to ‘opportunity knocks’ – what progress has been made in strengthening partnership performance?

When the first *Missed Opportunities* study was published in 2013, the sector had a patchy record of supporting humanitarian partnerships; the study lamented the inadequacy of the investment in, and commitment to, such partnerships and concluded that ‘the reality is that efforts to work with national and local actors do not play a central role in the majority of international humanitarian work’. The subsequent Typhoon Haiyan study in the Philippines found that ‘humanitarian partnership can strengthen the appropriateness of assistance, offer efficiencies, and contribute to a more connected response affording greater sustainability’. However, it also observed weaknesses in local NGO capacity that challenged the ability of partnerships to respond at scale. While the South Sudan study undertaken in 2015 concurred with the potential that existed for partnerships to provide effective assistance, it found that the exclusive nature of the humanitarian system, which is internationally led, offered little space for the diversity of national actors. The report highlighted the need for change in the humanitarian system including to the way in which donors, the UN and INGOs provide support and space for national actors.

At the time this research was being undertaken, some of these much-needed shifts were being set in motion. Most

important has been the endorsement of the localisation agenda during the WHS, which has placed partnership at the forefront of humanitarian response. It will now be far harder for local actors to be passed over due to their perceived lack of capability or visibility in disasters. With this in mind, the Nepal earthquake response has been timely and as the title of this report suggests, opportunity has indeed knocked as it offers the international humanitarian community a chance to experience humanitarian response as it is likely to be delivered more frequently in the future – led by government and delivered by local organisations, with the international humanitarian system playing a support role.

Given the irregularity with which national leadership and implementation of disaster response occurs, it should come as no surprise that the response had its challenges, but despite these there is much to commend what has been achieved by the different partners in the response. It also offers significant potential for learning both about response in Nepal and more globally, for the future. Key recommendations from the earthquake response include:

- **strengthen partnership** between international and national responders for preparedness planning
- **strengthen collaboration** and build local capacity for humanitarian surge and response
- **improve partnership practice** in order to make the shift from international to national response.

### The need to strengthen partnership between international and national responders for preparedness planning

Who	What	Where
Donors	There is an urgent need for continued global investment in preparedness planning and capacity in Nepal but in a way that is situated in the local context and that builds on existing structures. At a central level, donors should continue to support the NRRC to strengthen preparedness and response.	Nepal
INGOs and UN agencies	There is a need to strengthen governmental and non-governmental preparedness at the district level across the country. The District Lead Support Agency role offers an excellent opportunity to achieve this.	Nepal

### The need to strengthen collaboration and build local capacity for humanitarian surge and response

Who	What	Where
Donors	Given the evidence of the earthquake response in which local NGOs played a leadership role and in the spirit of the Grand Bargain, donors must find a means of directly funding local NGOs whether through the establishment of a pooled funding facility or through bilateral agreements. The development of this fund before disaster strikes will allow time to establish it outside of the pressures of response.	Nepal
Government, INGOs and UN agencies	Government policies on targeting of assistance failed to include some of those that were most vulnerable. It is urgent that a coordinated and principled approach for joint assessment and targeting can be agreed for adoption in future disasters.	Nepal
INGOs and UN agencies	International organisations should shift from investing in their own surge capacity to supporting that of their partners in advance of crises. This will require a broader and deeper level of engagement with local NGOs outside of disaster response.	Nepal and Global
INGOs and UN agencies	It will be necessary for international organisations to change the mindsets and skill sets of international surge staff to ensure they have the right attitude and relevant skills to work collaboratively with partners in the earliest stages of a response.	Global
Local NGOs	Based on the experience of the earthquake response, local NGOs should review their own standby arrangements to ensure that they are organisationally prepared to respond in the future. This should include negotiations with their INGO partners on support for preparedness planning and equitable partnership arrangements for disaster response.	Nepal

### The importance of continuing to improve partnership practice in order to make the shift from international to national response

Who	What	Where
INGOs and UN agencies	There is a need to revise existing humanitarian partnership models based on the earthquake response in order to accommodate the delivery of assistance through partnership at scale and to inculcate these into organisational practice.	Nepal and Global
INGOs and UN agencies	Models of humanitarian delivery through local partners must be accompanied by sustained investments in local NGO organisational capacity to a standard and quality that permits a shift to partner-led response.	Nepal and Global
INGOs and UN agencies	The Grand Bargain negotiated during the World Humanitarian Summit has provided a context for increasing the efficiencies and effectiveness of the humanitarian system, and these changes must be role-modelled in how INGOs work with shared partners where standardised approaches to reporting and a shared commitment to providing support would reduce administrative effort and strengthen the potential for capacity development.	Nepal and Global
Charter for Change signatories	While the commitments outlined in the Charter for Change offer essential guidance for partnership situations such as the earthquake response, there is a need to develop a simple set of measurable indicators for each of the commitments to permit a level of oversight that could assist in determining progress made against this important set of obligations.	Global
Local NGOs	Membership of the NEAR network offers an important opportunity for local NGOs to influence the wider policies and practices of the humanitarian system that affect their capacities and operations and the well-being of communities.	Nepal and Global

## ANNEX I

# Summary terms of reference

### Research on humanitarian partnerships in action: The response to the Nepal 2015 earthquake

Six development and humanitarian agencies – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund – have been collaborating since 2012 to research our experiences of partnership working in humanitarian responses, and to develop policy and advocacy positions to promote partnerships approaches throughout international and humanitarian systems. We are conducting an in-depth study of the Nepal earthquake response to explore how the humanitarian system can move towards a more collaborative approach between national and international humanitarian organisations in an acute fast-onset crisis. This research will also consider how best to contribute to the development of preparedness measures with an increased role for national and local organisations in Nepal and other countries.

### Goal and purpose of the research

The main objective of this research is to conduct an in-depth study of the Nepal earthquake response to explore how the humanitarian system can move towards a more collaborative approach between national and international humanitarian organisations in an acute fast-onset crisis. This is based on the assumption that the expectations of national governments will increasingly be to ensure that the humanitarian response is locally led and of high quality, as it was in Nepal; this is indicative of the new norm within the humanitarian sector. This research will also consider how best to contribute to the development of preparedness measures (potentially through a preparedness agreement, or other framework) with an increased role for national and local organisations in Nepal and other countries.

In particular, the research output will aim to:

- Look at the demands on the whole system (UN, INGOs, national NGOs, CBOs, government) to scale up in relation to working with and through partners.
- Evaluate how the humanitarian system adapted from the de facto comprehensive approach to a more collaborative model of response at the instigation of the Nepalese government, and assess what steps need to be put in place to enable stronger partner-led response in acute fast-onset crises to ensure a high

quality response in line with humanitarian principles and standards. This will include whether there are ‘rules of thumb’ or guidelines in relation to developing new partnership agreements.

- Consider the challenges of moving towards a collaborative approach.
- Build the evidence in relation to a response that is led by local actors – both government and CBOs.
- Contribute to the debate in Nepal and elsewhere on how best to prepare for acute fast-onset crises, in relation to agreeing roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in advance, and ensuring a strong role for local state and civil society actors.

### Methodology

This work will be undertaken by two consultants working closely together – one from the UK and one from Nepal. The following methods will be used:

- Literature review looking at evidence from studies of partnership in operational contexts, as well as documents relating to Nepal and the response to the 2015 earthquake in Nepal:
  - comprehensive set of qualitative data-gathering from across six agencies’ experience of working in partnership on humanitarian work.
- Interviews to understand how working with local and national organisations has been facilitated in the response to the 2015 earthquake:
  - semi-structured interviews with agency staff
  - series of interviews with local and national partner staff (across the six agencies which have been working in partnerships for humanitarian work in a range of contexts)
  - series of interviews with UN agency staff, Nepalese national and local government staff, and donors (EU, DFID, Irish Aid, USAID and others).
- Consultation, feedback and validation workshop in Nepal at the end of the research trip, including with organisations outside of the six agencies and their partners.

- Consultation and validation workshop in UK to present and discuss the findings to staff of the six agencies (after submission of the first draft).

## Final output

Final report for publication which speaks to the objectives and which links the experience in Nepal to broader global ambitions to move to a collaborative approach to humanitarian response.

## Management of the research consultancy

The consultants will be contracted to Tearfund. The research will be supported by a steering committee made up of one representative from each of the six agencies, which will commit to reviewing and inputting into the development of the draft and final reports and getting organisational sign off.

Each agency will also commit to organising interviews for the consultant with their respective partner agencies.

## Timeline

- **Late April:** research consultancy starts
- **Late April/early May:** literature review, interview matrix and field research
- **July:** final research report published



## ANNEX 2

# Research participants

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### National and district government representatives

- Baburam Bhandari, Chief, National Emergency Operations Centre, Kathmandu
- Mamta Bista, Department of Women and Children (and Protection Cluster representative)
- Shyam Singh, Division Chief, Department of Urban Development and Building Construction, Gorkha District
- Narayan Prasad Bhatta, Chief District Officer, Gorkha District
- Anirudra Nepal, DDRC Focal Person, Sindhupalchok District
- Chet Prasad Amagai, Secretary, Barpak Village Development Committee, Gorkha
- Hari Bahadur Ghale, DDRC Member, Gorkha District
- Dil Prasad Gurung, Senior Auxiliary Health Worker, Gumda VDC, Gorkha

### Kathmandu – national, local and community organisations

- Om Thapaliya, Executive Director, HomeNet Nepal
- Rabindra Maharjan, Chairperson, Campaign for Sustainable Community Development
- Kamal Gosai, Executive Director, Clean Energy Nepal (CEN)
- Rajan Thapa, Programme Coordinator, Clean Energy Nepal (CEN)
- Murari Gautam, Project Manager, Community Action Nepal
- Padam Sundas, Executive Director, SAMATA Foundation
- Ujjwal Sundas, Managing Director, SAMATA Foundation
- Ram Bahadur Charmakar, National Programme Coordinator, SAMATA Foundation
- Min Bahadur Shahi, Executive Director, KIRDARC and Coordinator, Humanitarian Accountability Monitoring Initiative
- Ram Chandra Neupane, Chairperson, Disaster Preparedness Network Nepal
- Surya Narayan Shrestha, Deputy Executive Director, National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET)
- Ganesh Kumar Jimee, Director, DPER Division, National Society for Earthquake Technology
- Prashanna Man Pradhan, Environment and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO)
- Manindra Malla, Head of Program Desk, Caritas Nepal
- Lajana Manandhar, Executive Director, Lumanti
- Surendra Shrestha, Executive Director, Group of Helping Hands (SAHAS)
- Jagat Deuja, Programme Manager, Community Self Reliance Centre

## Kathmandu – international organisations

- Basu Neure, Partnership Quality Coordinator, Oxfam
- Cecilia Keizer, Country Director, Oxfam
- Dipankar Patnaik, Senior Emergency Programme Manager, Christian Aid
- Douwe Dijkstra, Country Director, Tearfund
- Rajan Ghimire, Response Manager, Tearfund
- Shahid Khan, Partnership Support Coordinator, Trócaire
- Bhim Bahadur Khadka, M&E Coordinator, ActionAid Nepal
- Basana Sapkota, Project Coordinator, ActionAid Nepal
- Arshad Rashid, Team Leader, Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform
- Sarah Blin, Acting Chairperson, Association of International NGOs in Nepal/Country Director, Handicap International
- Moira Reddick, Coordinator, Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium and UN Resident Coordinator's Office
- Jennifer Dwyne Barenstein, Team Leader, Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform
- Julie Gurung, Senior Coordinator, Programme Development and Impact Assessment, CARE Nepal
- Santosh Sharma, Emergency Response Coordinator, CARE Nepal
- Anup Raj Pokhrel, Partnership Specialist, CARE Nepal
- Pete La Raus, Deputy Team Leader, Programme Development and Quality/Response Team Leader, Save the Children
- Bernd Schell, Flagship 2 Coordinator, Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium/Red Cross
- Jenny McCann, Response Director, World Vision
- Mark Galpin, Executive Director, United Mission to Nepal
- Gaurab Sagar Dawadi, Programme Manager, DRR and CCA Programme, Oxfam
- Dinesh Bajracharya, National WASH Coordinator, Oxfam
- Binay Dhital, Programme Quality Director, Oxfam

## Gorkha – national and district organisations

- Pawan Khanal, Executive Director, Goreto
- Sitaram Shrestha, Executive Director, Shree Swanra Integrated Community Development Centre (SSICDC)
- Dronacharya Timilsina, Finance Manager, Shree Swanra Integrated Community Development Centre (SSICDC)
- Hari Devkota, Executive Director, Unification Nepal
- Santosh Bashyal, Finance Manager, Unification Nepal
- Srijana Koirala, Executive Director, Paddhati Bikas Sewa Kendra
- Janaki Bogati (KC), Project Coordinator, Good Neighbours Nepal
- Til Kumari Tamang, Programme Coordinator, Holistic Development Service Centre
- Hem Raj Dhakal, Programme Coordinator, Tulasi Meher Unesco Club

## Gorkha – international organisations

- Vijay Raj Pant, Gorkha Programme Manager, Oxfam
- Mahendra Laxmi, District Gender Coordinator, UN Women
- Shyam Raj Ghimire, Child Protection Officer, UNICEF
- Purna Puri, District Manager, World Vision
- Binaya Prakash Baral, Advocacy and External Relations Coordinator, World Vision
- Binay Amatya, District Manager, Save the Children International
- Drew Keutschenreuter, Head of Sub-Office, International Organization for Migration
- Madhav Dhakal, Emergency Response Manager for Gorkha District, CARE Nepal

## Sindhupalchok – national and district organisations

- Nirajan Chaulagain, Programme Coordinator, Tuki
- Kamal Kakshapati, Secretary, Nepal Red Cross
- Bijay Shrestha, Chairperson, NGO Federation
- Bhagwati Shrestha, Chairperson, Sindhu Development Centre
- Shreedhar Neupane, Project Coordinator, Janahit Gramin Sewa Samiti
- Govinda Sapkota, Executive Director, Community Development and Environment Conservation Forum
- Prativa Shrestha, District Coordinator, Saathi
- Bhawani Shrestha, Chairperson, Women Self-Reliant Centre

## Sindhupalchok – international organisations

- Anita Saha, District Manager, Oxfam
- Yam Thapa, Officer in Charge, District Office, Save the Children International
- Yubraj Roka, District Lead Support Agency, District Coordinator, Save the Children
- JB Bohara, District Manager, World Vision
- Manish Gautam, Field Early Recovery Coordinator, United Nations Development Programme
- Pallab Regmi, Emergency Programme Officer, Christian Aid

## Donor representatives

- Piush Kayastha, Programme Officer, ECHO Nepal
- Nicola Murray, Department for International Development
- Commissioning agency steering group, United Kingdom
- Tim Ingram, Humanitarian Policy Officer, Tearfund
- Jane Backhurst, Senior Adviser Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy, Christian Aid
- Francisco Yermo, Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy Adviser, ActionAid
- Anne Street, Head of Humanitarian policy, CAFOD
- Debbie Hillier, Humanitarian Policy Adviser, Oxfam
- Frédérique Lehoux, Humanitarian Partnership Coordinator, CARE International

## ANNEX 3

# The legal basis for disaster management in Nepal

Policy document <sup>49</sup>	Date	Description
Calamity (Relief) Act 2039	1982	This Act allocated the responsibility for preparing and responding to disasters in Nepal to the government. The Act, for the first time in the history of Nepal, provided for a disaster management administrative structure in the country.
The Local Self-Governance Act	1999	Promotes the concept of local self-governance within the decentralisation framework for managing environment-friendly development. The Act has given due emphasis to the interrelationship between development process, environment, and disaster. The Act encourages local entities, ie District Development Committees (DDCs), Municipalities, and Village Development Committees (VDCs), to find solutions to problems by themselves.
Disaster Preparedness and Relief Plans	2008/2011	District-level guidance for developing response and preparedness plans.
The National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management	2009	This strategy outlines the government's vision for making Nepal a disaster-resilient country.
Local Disaster Management Planning Guidelines	2011	These are village-level preparedness plans which target VDCs.
National Disaster Response Framework	2013	Outlines the framework for disaster response in Nepal.
District Disaster Management Plans	2013	These guide districts in developing disaster-preparedness plans and building the capacity of VDCs and communities as first responders.

# Endnotes

- 1 [www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/opportunity-knocks](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/opportunity-knocks)
- 2 An assessment was made of the extent to which partnerships had strengthened the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coverage and connectedness of the response.
- 3 The Charter for Change is an initiative led by both national and international NGOs to practically implement changes to the way the humanitarian system operates to enable a more locally-led response. It comprises eight commitments which international NGO signatories commit to implement in full by May 2018. It has been signed by 29 INGOs and has been endorsed by 134 organisations in total (see [www.charter4change.org](http://www.charter4change.org)).
- 4 NEAR is a movement of local organisations formed to reshape the humanitarian and development system to one that is locally driven and owned, and is built around equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships. See [www.near.ngo](http://www.near.ngo)
- 5 See [www.charter4change.org](http://www.charter4change.org)
- 6 ActionAid, Cafod, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Tearfund (2015), *Missed Opportunities No More: An Agenda for Change – localisation of aid and humanitarian partnerships*.
- 7 Oxfam (2012), *Working together – Oxfam’s partnership principles*.
- 8 The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2009), *Terminology on disaster risk reduction*.
- 9 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2012), *Key messages: The IASC Transformative Agenda*.
- 10 Map courtesy of Oxfam America. Available at [www.oxfamamerica.org/take-action/save-lives/nepal-earthquake](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/take-action/save-lives/nepal-earthquake)
- 11 Map courtesy of Kathmandu Living Labs, [QuakeRelief.info](http://quake-relief.info). Available at <http://kathmandulivinglabs.github.io/quake-maps/> (Image amended to highlight in orange the districts that were visited during the research.)
- 12 United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (2015), 25 April 2015 *Gorkha Earthquake Disaster Risk Reduction Situation Report DRR: sitrep 2015-002 – 2 June 2015*, p2. Figures compiled from EM-DAT: The International Disaster Database, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters – CRED (2015).
- 13 [www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/opportunity-knocks](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/opportunity-knocks)
- 14 For example, interviews revealed that the DDRMP in one of the districts visited during the research had not been updated for four years and as a consequence was not used in the earthquake response.
- 15 More details are available in the handbook for Flagship 4 which is available at <http://flagship4.nrrc.org.np/document/flagship-4-handbook-english>
- 16 Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT) (2016), *STAIT Learning Review – Preparedness for Response in Nepal* (draft report), p11.
- 17 Start Fund (2015), *Developing a Joint Emergency Contingency Plan after Floods in Mid-Western Nepal*, p1.
- 18 *Ibid*, p3.
- 19 See also [www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yifat-susskind/confronting-earthquake-with-love-mission-sneha](http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yifat-susskind/confronting-earthquake-with-love-mission-sneha)
- 20 While the Nepal earthquake triggered a surge by international militaries and search and rescue teams, a discussion of the contributions that these teams made to the response are outside the scope of the research.
- 21 As part of the Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals agreed that major sudden-onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict that require system-wide mobilisation should trigger a system-wide humanitarian surge response (referred to as an ‘L3 activation’). An L2 emergency is considered less severe and does not trigger the surge response.
- 22 See for example Austin, L and O’Neil, G (2016), *The state of surge capacity in the humanitarian sector 2015*, Transforming surge capacity project, The START Network, p33.
- 23 Data obtained from United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Nepal (2015), *Nepal earthquake humanitarian response*, April to September 2015.
- 24 Asia Foundation (2015), *Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal, Phase 1: June 2015, Synthesis report*, September 2015, p34.
- 25 The survey comprised face-to-face interviews with 2,980 respondents randomly selected from 240 Village Development Committees and municipalities across 14 of 26 earthquake-affected districts, along with 298 ward leaders.
- 26 The assessment used a multi-stage cluster sampling in order to give a complete picture of the shelter situation of households in districts of Nepal that sustained the highest levels of shelter damage as a result of the April and May earthquakes. A sample of 120 households (+10% buffer) was drawn from each of the 15 districts of interest, including a minimum of 120 households drawn overall from areas that were inaccessible by road at the time of data collection in priority/non-priority districts.
- 27 Thomson Reuters Foundation, 10 May 2016. Available at [news.trust.org/documents/reshape-aid/nepal-results.pdf](http://news.trust.org/documents/reshape-aid/nepal-results.pdf)
- 28 However, it is worth noting that partner-led INGOs often had more streamlined systems and tended to be more willing to pass responsibility to partners in a shorter timeframe.
- 29 INGOs tended to be less hands-on for relief distributions or community-based activities than they were for sector-specific interventions.
- 30 While some local NGOs received donor funding directly for their development programmes, none of those that participated in the study indicated that they had received funding directly for the earthquake response.
- 31 A commitment to address this gap was one of the outcomes of the WHS.

- 32 The FTS provides a record of all reported humanitarian aid contributions – with a special focus on humanitarian response plans and appeals.
- 33 Global Humanitarian Assistance (2015), 'An analysis of humanitarian funding to Nepal in the wake of the second earthquake', Crisis Briefing, 13 May 2013, Development initiatives.
- 34 Thomson Reuters Foundation, 10 May 2016. Available at [news.trust.org/documents/reshape-aid/nepal-results.pdf](http://news.trust.org/documents/reshape-aid/nepal-results.pdf)
- 35 In the Philippines *Missed Opportunities* study, one local NGO participated in the Tacloban-based HCT. In the South Sudan *Missed Out* study there are two seats on the HCT for local NGOs.
- 36 Adapted from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015) *Nepal Floods Contingency Plan*, prepared by the Humanitarian Country Team, 2015.
- 37 In comparison, the *Missed Again* study notes that in the Typhoon Haiyan response, the cluster coordination system often worked in parallel with a local-level government coordination system.
- 38 In contrast there had been far greater investment in, and uptake of, DLSAs in districts that were vulnerable to flooding.
- 39 Save the Children (2016), *Did the humanitarian response to the Nepal Earthquake ensure no one was left behind? A case study on the experience of marginalised groups in humanitarian action*, p1.
- 40 Lessons from the humanitarian response to the 2014 Karnali River Floods in Nepal suggest that assessing vulnerability and targeting in a way that is consistent with the humanitarian principle of impartiality and that identifies those most in need of assistance has been a challenge: 'political pressure complicated response and beneficiary selection, ultimately leaving the most vulnerable behind'. (Zurich Insurance, ISET-International and Practical Action Nepal (2015), *Risk Nexus – Urgent Case for Recovery: What can we learn from the August 2014 Karnali River floods in Nepal?* p4.)
- 41 See for example Save the Children (2016), *Did the humanitarian response to the Nepal Earthquake ensure no one was left behind? A case study on the experience of marginalised groups in humanitarian action*.
- 42 The table comprises a selection of national and district NGOs across the three locations that were visited during the research. Budget and staff increases were calculated based on annual figures provided by the NGO for the period before the earthquake and at the time the research was conducted. The changes are expressed in percentage terms.
- 43 Lessons learned from a development NGO's response to a major disaster: a case study of UMN's response to the 2015 Earthquakes in Nepal, p6.
- 44 Interviews with local NGOs suggested that INGO staff salaries can be as much as three times those of local staff salaries for the same level of responsibilities.
- 45 More information about the Charter for Change and the full text of the eight commitments can be found at [www.charter4change.org](http://www.charter4change.org)
- 46 Street, A (2016), *The World Humanitarian Summit: What happened – what next? Charter4Change analysis of outcomes and next steps on localisation*. Available at <https://charter4change.org/2016/05/26/the-world-humanitarian-summit-what-happened-what-next/>
- 47 NEAR is a movement of local organisations formed to reshape the humanitarian and development system to one that is locally-driven and owned, and is built around equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships. See [www.near.ngo](http://www.near.ngo).
- 48 Adeso Africa (2016), *A more dignified and equitable humanitarian system: How to truly localise aid*, p1.
- 49 Government of Nepal (2013), *Disaster Management Guidelines*, Ministry of Home Affairs, p6.

### **ActionAid**

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ActionAid is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (company no. 01295174). A registered charity in England and Wales (no. 274467) and Scotland (no. SC045476).

### **CAFOD**

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### **CARE**

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