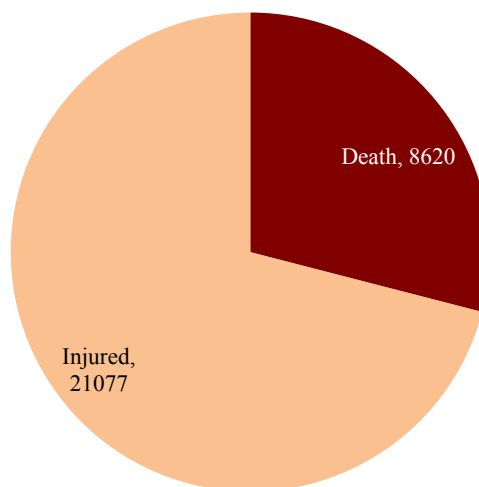


# Role of Civil Society in Natural Disaster Management

## Background

The devastating Gorkha Earthquake on April 25 and its aftershocks have claimed the lives of more than 8,000 people and injured 22,000. The Earthquake has completely damaged more than half a million physical structures and partially damaged 270,000. It has severely affected 14 districts of the country. The academic calendar has been disrupted by the damage on 7800 schools in different districts. More than 1000 health facilities have been affected by the Gorkha Earthquake resulting in a serious impact on delivery of health services. The historical monuments, government buildings, temples and prison buildings have been damaged by an earthquake. It has also damaged and destroyed grains and cattle worth billions of rupees in the worst-hit 14 districts. The daily life of people is yet to return to normalcy due to the continuing aftershocks. Within one month since the Gorkha Earthquake, the rescue operation has almost been concluded. There are still 300 people unaccountable and some dead bodies remain to be identified.

**Total Number of Killed/Injured in the Most Affected Districts**



In such critical juncture, there are high risks in violation of basic Human Rights. The State needs to fulfill its obligation by immediately providing humanitarian assistance and while ensuring protection of human rights simultaneously. Especially, the state must protect and guarantee the people's rights related to major five treaties viz. ICCPR, ICESCR, CEDAW, CRC and CRPD. That is why INSEC is supporting government through its various activities to make them responsible liable in the time of this great natural crisis.

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake on April 25, INSEC is continuously monitoring the situation of all districts with especial attention to highly affected 14 districts. INSEC representatives are uninterruptedly providing news on the daily basis regarding the damage by the earthquake and subsequent relief distribution process. This information is being published online as a daily report on INSEC website [www.inseconline.org](http://www.inseconline.org).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, analyses of the report in the form of press notes are being released along with the recommendations to the stakeholders.<sup>2</sup>

## Rescue Operation

In rescue operation, Nepal Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police played an effective role<sup>3</sup>. In Sindhupalchok district, the soldiers were involved in rescue operations within 20 minutes after the earthquake struck. The District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) immediately provided a

1 (<http://www.inseconline.org/dailyreport.php>)

2 (<http://www.insec.org.np/index.php?type=press>). One day discussion program was held among INSEC staffs and INSEC district representatives to gather information of post-earthquake scenario in the district. The information, experience, recommendations and facts provided by the district representatives have been presented as a concept note for discussion within human rights community.

3 Based on the report provided by the INSEC district representatives in a discussion session held in Dhulikhel

temporary relief of Rs 2000 to each victim's family<sup>4</sup>. Further, Nepal Army provided medical assistance to the injured by conducting a health camp. A number of technicians and soldiers of foreign countries were equally involved in earthquake-affected districts.

### Relief Distribution

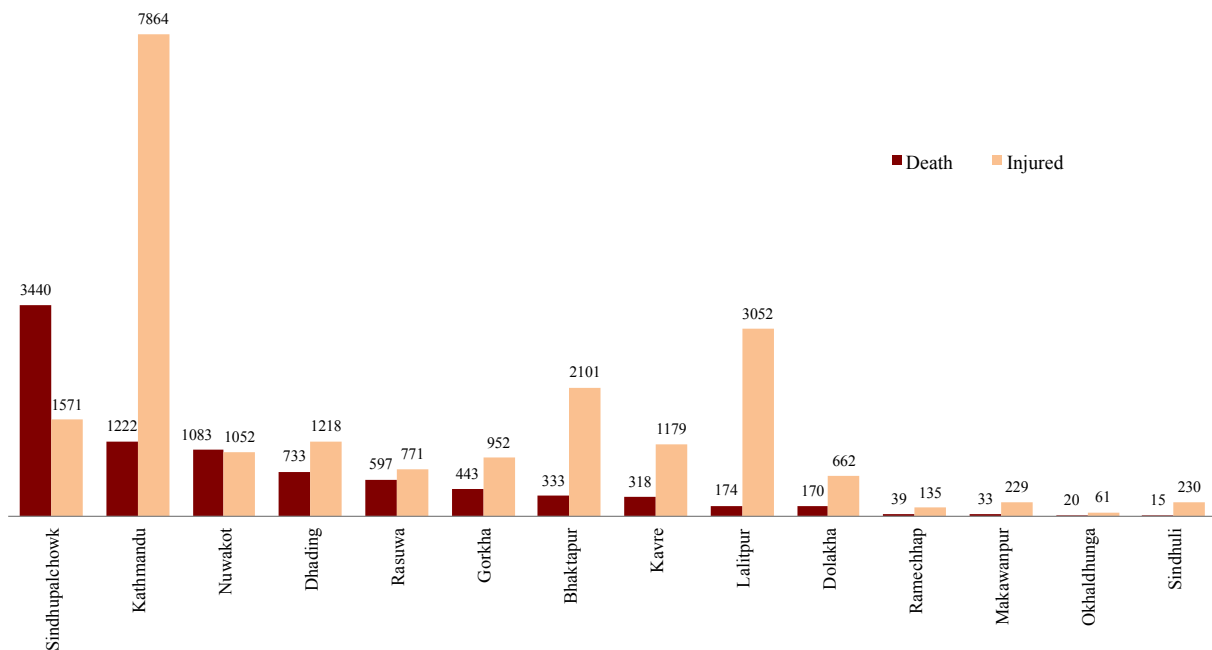
As per the information gathered by INSEC through its district representatives, the relief distributions were limited only to easily accessible places of the district or the first few weeks<sup>5</sup>. The relief distribution process was disproportional to the need of the victims. INSEC representatives reported that in many remote places of the districts, the victims did not get adequate relief and in few places they could get none. Some local political parties were found focusing on their own constituency to distribute relief, in turn, politicalizing the whole relief distribution process. Such tendency was seen in Gorkha among others. In accessible places of Gorkha, the relief arrived more than needed whereas in Sindhupalchok, Dhading, Dolakha, Kavre and Ramechhap and some remote parts of Gorkha, the victims had to wait over a week before they could get any relief.

These problems were seen in the districts where the relief was distributed without any coordination with local administration. Some NGOs distributed relief material only in places with access to road and solely with the intention of publicity. After the earthquake, tents and tarpaulins were in needed urgently but were inadequate as found the INSEC district representatives during the monitoring.

### Natural Disaster Management and Capability

It is a well-known fact that Nepal is 11<sup>th</sup> position in the list of the countries vulnerable to Earthquake.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, Aftermath of the April 25 Earthquake clearly demonstrated that the government and public-level preparation was inadequate. There were not enough soldiers and para military forces trained in post-earthquake rescue operation and there was shortage of necessary tools and equipment

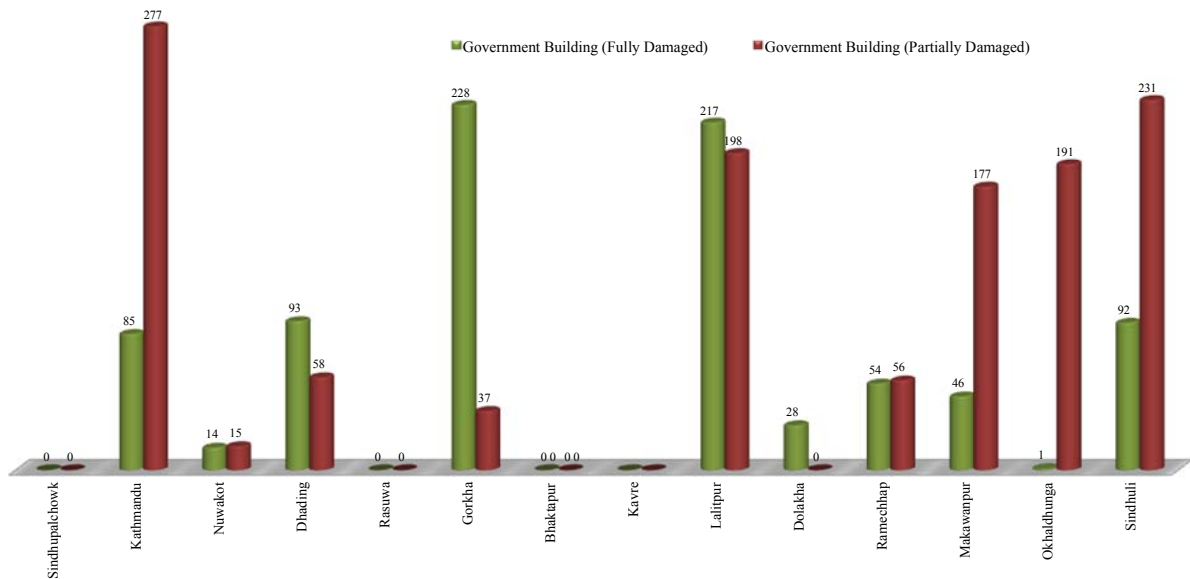
**Number of Killed/Injured the in Most Affected Districts**



4 Based on observation during a field monitoring by INSEC Lalitpur DR Ramesh Prasad Timilsina

5 <http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=news&id=49655&lang=np>

## Number of Government Buildings Damaged (Complete/Partial) in the Most Affected Districts



for them. There were some reports of people losing their lives due to the misunderstandings created by the NGO-provided training.<sup>7</sup>

### Major Problems and Risks Created by the Gorkha Earthquake

#### a) *Displacement in highly affected areas*

Right to Housing has been primarily raised by the International Human Rights documents. Article 25 of UDHR has given priority to lodging rights. In few areas of Sindhupalchok, Rasuwa and Gorkha, all villagers are displaced due to the landslides after the Earthquake. It is necessary to relocate those victims from the places where they had been living in for years<sup>8</sup>. The District Disaster Rescue and Relief Funds have already handed over the list of villages that need to be relocated due to the risk of landslides. The government is still unaware of the whereabouts of 300 people missing due to the earthquake.<sup>9</sup>

#### b) *Rehabilitation and Relocation*

People of Gorkha, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchok, Dhading, Dolakha and Makwanpur have urged the government to transfer them to safer places after the land that they were living have developed cracks after the earthquake<sup>10</sup>. It is important to manage transfer of those villagers as soon as possible considering that the monsoon is arriving in a couple of weeks and landslides that will possible trigger.

6 <http://www.nrcs.org/program/earthquake-preparedness-safer-communities>

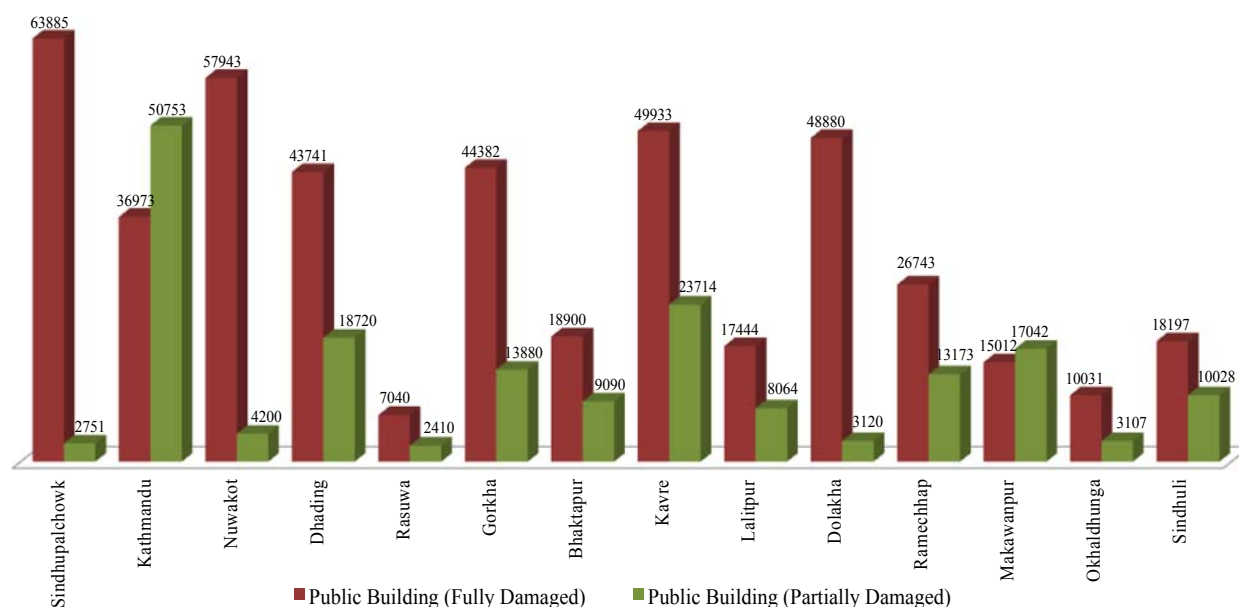
7 On April 25, Ritesh Pradhan of Banepa Municipality-8 was playing outside when earthquake hit. He was taught in school to hide under the bed during the earthquake and he did it accordingly. Unfortunately he was buried and killed when his house collapsed.

8 <http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=news&id=49783&lang=np>

9 <http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=news&id=49671&lang=np>

10 <http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=news&id=49655&lang=np>

## Number of Damaged Private Homes in the Most Affected Districts



### c) *Unemployment*

It is necessary to provide an alternative and immediate employment to people that was involved in industry, tourism, agriculture and business in an earthquake affected area.

### d) *Psycho-social Problems*

It is being learnt that the patients of mental illness are increasing in various hospitals of the Capital due to the trauma of the earthquake. There are few cases of suicides linked to earthquake-related problems.<sup>11</sup>

### e) *Possible Risk After Monsoon Begins*

As per the reports published by ICIMOD and others organizations working in climate sector, it is important to be alert due to the risk of massive landslides, floods and bursting of glacial lakes when the monsoon begins.

## Some Exemplary Practices

In a few districts, it was found exemplary practices in rescue and relief distributing process due to the efficiency of government employees and CDOs. In Sindhupalchok and Makwanpur districts, a simple process was followed in providing financial relief to bereaved families by the government. A relief of Rs 40,000 as funeral expenses was immediately provided to these families after a deed was prepared by local police in the presence of five local witnesses. However, in other districts, the local administration had made it mandatory to provide death certificates to claim such support.<sup>12</sup> It was a proper decision adopted by these district administrations.

11 Indra Bahadur Gelal, 61, of Kavre and teacher at Sati Devi Secondary School committed suicide after the trauma of the earthquake. He became mentally ill after his house was destroyed in the earthquake. INSEC has documented that in Kavre, seven people committed suicide after the earthquake. But, it is not clear whether earthquake is the only reason or among others.

12 In Lalitpur district, the victims could not get funeral expenses on time after the administration made postmortem report and witnesses mandatory.

The VDC-level Disaster Rescue Committee Makwanpur and Sindhuli District was effective in relief distribution process. The process was transparent and accessible due to the presence of local stakeholders, local media personnel and right activists. Examples of generating employment by initiating repair and re-construction of physical infrastructure damaged by the Earthquake can be useful for other districts as well.

### **Transparency**

#### **Government**

The government has initiated steps to adopt transparency in relief distribution process<sup>13</sup>. It had publicly appealed to deposit financial assistance through Prime Minister's Relief Fund. The information of how much fund is received and from whom is posted in the website. However, this process is not complete. The transparency is complete until procurement distribution processes remain unknown.

#### **Political Parties**

In preliminary stage, the presence of political parties and the cadres of their wings were not satisfactory. Political parties are collecting financial support for their fund.<sup>14</sup> They have not made it public as how the fund was collected and from whom it was collected. It is their duty to deposit the amount in State's coffer so as to make State accountable and responsible.

News regarding political parties distributing relief worth millions is being made public. Must be made public whether that fund is private or from other donors.

#### **International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)**

The INGOs were found to be more active in earthquake-affected areas giving relief to the victims and working on their rehabilitation. The work to be carried out by INGOs on post-earthquake reconstruction and rehabilitation must be in partnership with the government and the monitoring responsibility must be given through local stakeholders.

#### **Regulation of Business Houses and Other Organizations**

Various business households and organizations had announced publicly that they would build houses for the victims. Similar announcement has been made by NRN. The rehabilitation process must be initiated immediately developing a monitoring mechanism and preparing the structure that include land zoning policy, technical expertise to build such houses and settlement development structure.

#### **Rule of Law and Accountability**

The Supreme Court of Nepal has already issued its verdict on the writ to initiate the process of taking action against those violating the building codes. The government had replied in writing to the Supreme Court promising to take legal action after forming a committee. The people are eagerly waiting for the executive of government's pledge.

#### **Public Dialogue and Information**

Civilians expect consolation and concern from the State during the time of crisis. But, the government failed to keep in touch with the people and to update them on regular intervals.

---

13 <http://opmcm.gov.np/en/>

14 <http://aajakokhabar.com/newsDetails.php?nid=14203>

## **Public Authorities**

Some authorities like Nepal Telecom, Nepal Oil Corporation, Radio Nepal and Nepal Television which have impacts on normal life of the people performed in commendable manner. The national roads and bridges remained functional. But, services like electricity, road, internet and telephone are still not functioning properly in the remote areas. People are forced to live in dark or long hours of power shedding.

## **Issues that needs an Immediate Regulations**

*It is not possible for the State alone to rebuild all the sectors affected by the Earthquake. Following the damages caused by the Earthquake, people's awareness level on required improvement and development has increased. At this point, the government should be able to adopt a new, effective plan and a responsible working method. State should be able to guarantee people's right to life as per the universal principle of human rights. To realize that, all procedures, action plans and processes should be implemented which are required to make relief distribution, reconstruction and rehabilitation carried out by the state as human rights-friendly. For this,*

- a) Enact laws within the legal jurisdiction of state to develop housing and settlement
- b) Pass proposed laws by incorporating the studies conducted on geological and natural disasters. Make an effective legal mechanism to review, support and coordinate by continuously monitoring the implementation of such laws. Enact laws to ensure clear confusion in relief distribution and rehabilitation created by multi-centers and conflicting points.
- c) Partner with national and international individuals or organizations for rehabilitation and reconstruction process. Make transparent, participatory and simple work plan. Ensure meaningful participation of local government, donors, quake victims and civil society in these activities, auditing and preparing impact assessment report
- d) Make education sector, media and other public sectors more effective and active so as to increase awareness and level of information on natural disasters.
- e) Identify and unreservedly fulfill the need of staffs, security forces and volunteers who need are involved during the natural disasters for rescue and relief activities
- f) Provide training to health workers and teachers about administering medical assistance and counseling to the victims of natural disasters.
- g) Identify special needs of the women, new mothers, pregnant women, people with disability and senior citizens and remained prepared to assist them
- h) Mobilize all the State Human Rights Institutions seeking support from them in fulfill State duties of relief distribution, rehabilitation and reconstruction
- i) Adopt a process which will also enhance national capacity to carry on the projects planned and initiated using foreign donation
- j) Issue government appeal to subject experts and skilled Nepalis residing in and out of the country to get involved in reconstruction and management work
- k) Forming a task force for legal, structural and management level activities by identifying past weaknesses
- l) Finding financial and technical support for reestablishment of industries
- m) Preparing for the additional disasters in the monsoon likely to be caused by earthquake effects
- n) Increasing direct contact between the government officials and people through public media ensuring lively communication and public dialogue between the State and the people
- o) Making government administration's dialogue with civil forums, NGOs and academic institutions

- p) Making hand tools, seeds, fertilizer and local skills and technologies for storage available to the farmers. Providing reliefs to the farmers after assessing their lost in terms of livestock, crop and storage capacity

### **Recommendations**

- 1) Chief District Officer of Solukhumbu Janka Nath Dhakal said that 75% houses of the district are completely damaged and remaining 15% are partially damaged. He said that the recommendation has been sent to center to declare the district as a district in emergency. As per the DDR C, the houses in Goli, Chaulakharka and Bhakanji of area no 9 and Ramche, Khumjung, Sotang, and Bungchekan VDCs of area no 2 sustained heavy damage by the earthquake. Initiate relief and rehabilitation process by declaring the district as an emergency area.
- 2) Initiate relief and re-establishment process in following areas apart from the areas where the government has declared emergency
  - a) Bachok, Kulki, Ilampokhari, Dudhpokhari and Bichaur VDCs of Lamjung district
  - b) Dobhane, Khatamma, Chaukidandi, Kudakakaule and Kulung VDCs of Bhojpur district
  - c) Lamidanda, Nunthala, Kharpa, Kubhinde, Sungdel, Salle, Mangaltar, Suntale, Devasthan and Jaleshwari VDCs of Khotang
- 3) Increase allowances to government employees, Nepal Army, Nepal Police and APF personnel who are working hard in this crisis. Current allowance of Rs 120 is too meager for a day.
- 4) Due to the lack of allocation of budget to the vehicles' fuel and for other administrative expenses, the relief and rehabilitation process is affected. The government needs to provide sufficient budget to the DDR C.
- 5) Make relief and rehabilitation process more effective, urge the international community for more assistance by making a brief victim-support plan with a timeframe.

### **For More Information**



#### **Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)**

POBox: 2726, Kathmandu, Nepal, Tel: +977-1-4278770

Fax: +977-1-4270551 email: [insec@insec.org.np](mailto:insec@insec.org.np)

Website: [www.insec.org.np](http://www.insec.org.np), [www.inseconline.org](http://www.inseconline.org)

**For Feedback: <http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=feedback&lang=en>**