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## *Nepal earthquake response: Field experience*



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### **Introduction**

Nepal is a small country sandwiched between India and China. It was hit by a major Earthquake on 25th April, 2015. As a result I got the opportunity to volunteer for relief and rescue work as a part of my fieldwork. My stay in Nepal was from 2nd May to 28th May 2015.

### **Objective**

The main objective was to visit the major Earthquake affected areas and to provide relief and psychosocial care to the community especially to women and children. During this process I visited Kavre, Sundara, Basanthapur Durbar Square, Goldhunga, Bhaktapur and Changu Narayan and had the opportunity to observe and interact with the community.

### **Activities**

During my fieldwork in Nepal, I was involved in distributing relief material along with organisations like KIDARC and TDH Nepal. I also attended a Rotary Club meeting where we discussed about the remote areas to visit and to distribute relief materials according to the needs assessment done by the volunteers of the organisation in association with the community members. I was mainly placed at Changu Narayan municipality and worked very closely with the women and children of the community. I engaged the children of Changu in drawing, playing indoor and outdoor games and writing poems and essays. This enabled me to analyse how the children perceive earthquakes and their experiences during the recent earthquake. Expressing their emotions through drawing and writing helped them to vent their inner feelings. The rest of the community people, especially the women were busy going to their fields to harvest, some would make candy out of the typical fruit called Lapsy and finally would join hands with us in building an Earth Bag Home. An Earth bag home is an earthquake-proof house. We (volunteers) along with the initiation of ICA Nepal built an Earth Bag Home for an elderly partially blind 82 year old man, who has no family to look after him. So this was basically a rebuilding process and now he happily lives in the house. I also interacted with community people about sanitation and environmental issues in the community as it is the matter of health and initiated a community cleaning activity with the community.

### **Findings and learning**

Social support was one of the strategies and skills I used to understand the community. To understand the community, we must build rapport only then we can achieve our objective. The major technique I used was observation. According to my observation, the resilience and coping mechanisms of Nepalese are high. Where on the one side people faced loss of family members and their assets; on the other side they move on with their day to day activities. The youth of Nepal is very sensitive towards the impacts of disaster and therefore on a voluntary basis and through the initiation of local, national and international organizations they were working very actively in the rescue, relief, rehabilitation and rebuilding process following the earthquake. Few organizations in coordination with the government have started working on housing and sanitation.. The Women in the community were very hard working and played multiple roles. They are very much empowered and involved in income generating activities. Different individuals and families have different stories and therefore I used active listening to listen to their stories and give them social support. I could totally empathise with the people going through the trauma as I witnessed the second earthquake and felt the frequent aftershocks. Drawing and

writing helped the victims to express their inner feelings and emotions. Children of the Pauwa community expressed themselves very vividly through drawing. Due to the deforestation that has taken place in Sindupalchowk, the area it is prone to landslides every year during the monsoons and this earthquake has destroyed the village completely.

### Challenges

The aftermath of Earthquake in Nepal has left behind many challenges to the inhabitants of Nepal. As Nepal has only one trauma centre, they lack professionals to provide psychosocial care and counselling to all the victims of the earthquake. Mental trauma is a major issue during disaster, if not taken care of; the person could be at risk. Victim survivors may end up with mental trauma due to various reasons; to mention a few: Loss of loved ones, loss of property, loss of cattle's and crops, unemployment, and family members staying out of the country for education or for work.

### Conclusion

Nepal is a beautiful country. But being beautiful is not enough when the government is unstable and communities are not empowered to look after the country. Government plays a crucial role to empower and educate the community. My 25 days of fieldwork experience in Nepal was exciting, great, and challenging. It has helped me to understand myself closely and developed a new energy on me. My experience with community sensitised me to the prevailing issues and gave me an opportunity to understand the community. I was overwhelmed and engrossed by the earthquake which helped me to become strong and not to lose confidence. Life lost cannot be brought back, but good preparatory measures for such disasters, by the government, will definitely minimise human loss. All the determinants of health could be observed and understood during my stay and work with the community.



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