

Disaster in Nepal: At a Glance

Nepal faces a myriad of hazards combined with other social evils, growing population, lack of education and awareness etc which results in high level of risks. As per UNDP 2004, Nepal stands at 11th to 30th worst country with respect to the vulnerability to earthquake and floods.

Nepal has also been suffering from other varieties of disaster such as landslides, avalanches, storms, droughts, epidemics etc out of which the glacier lake outburst flood (GLOF) and snow storm are frequent and affect the high altitudinal areas.

A wide range of physiological, geological, ecological, and meteorological and demography contributes to vulnerability of the country. It is estimated that disaster among others has been instrumental for the underdevelopment and impoverishment process in the country. The unavailability of the sufficient resources to address the computing demands, the inaccessibility to the remote parts jeopardizes the relief and the rescue efforts and also hinders the reconstruction and even rehabilitation process. There is no existence of financial mechanism or insurance policy to reduce the impact of disaster.

In this context, the necessity of the projective and pragmatic approach with the greater emphasis on pre-disaster mitigation and preparedness rescue during disaster and post disaster rehabilitation should be given adequate attention.

This note includes the brief report of GLOF occurred at Lamtang VDC and effort of SRDC along with Perigeo Onlus from Italy to mitigate the effects of disaster and rehabilitate the victims, if need be.

The team consisting of Prof Prem Kumar Khatri, Chairman of SRDC, Mr Santosh Bhagat Secretary of SRDC, Buddha Maharjan, Member and Toya Neupane, a local person with tourism business in Thamel had visited Dhunche, the district headquarters of Rasuwa district on last Sunday and Monday, 22nd and 23rd January, 2012 .

Location of the area

Lamtang VDC where the incident of GLOF and snow storm was observed on 28-29th December 2011 lies at one and half days trekking distance from Syafrubesi which is the point up to which motorable road is available.

Syafrubasi is almost 158 Km North West from Kathmandu in Bagmati Zone. This is also the entry point to the Kerung area, Tibet. Now there is a plan to link Kerung with Nepal India border.

The VDC has nearly 60 households consisting 315 (approx) populations mainly composed of Tamangs, one out of sixty-one ethnic groups in Nepal who reside the at high altitudinal Himalayan region of central Nepal.

SRDC team at nearby support centre

Following the event of GLOF and snow storm at Singdum village on on 28-29th December 2011 at Lamtang VDC, Ward No 1 and 3, a team of SRDC members composed of Prof. Dr. Prem K Khatri, Mr. Santosh K Bhagat, Mr. Toya P Neupane and Mr. Buddha Maharjan paid a visit to Dhunche (Head quarter of Rasuwa District, in which the victimized area lies). In order to collect the relevant information and also to analyze the mode of rehabilitation and reconstruction that could be extended to the victimize people.

The SRDC team started the trip at 5 am from the Kathmandu in a land cruiser jeep and reached Dhunche around 1 pm.

Talk with main stakeholders

a. the Red Cross Society

At first, the team visited the districts chapter office of Nepal Red Cross Society and met Mr. Babulal Tamang, the president of NRCS, Rasuwa Districts Chapter. He informed that there was severe damage on 16-18 houses built of stones, boulder and woods roofed with galvanized steel (tin), out of which 4-5 houses are in irreparable state. The life has been difficult due to displacement due to GLOF. Due to limited resources and technical people at the time, no supports were extending to these people in any form. Nevertheless, this is the most sought organization in such event.

b. District Administration

We also visited CDO office and met Mr. Yubraj Mainali, the acting CDO and asked about the situation. He informed in the similar lines as what Mr. Babulal Tamang said.

The village people, or the victims had not reported about damage because the govt has a limited ceiling – 5,000 rupees for the damage per household. And people do not find it substantial considering the distance to travel, stay in local hotels and wait a day or two for the support.

Therefore, people did not come at all. Or, this is the official version of the district officials.

c. District Police

A visit to the Deputy Superintendent of Police was also paid in order to collect information from DySP Mr. Achyut P. Pudasaini.

The chief of police further added that two horses had died in the event and few people are severely injured however the DySP office has not provided any support, either.

As there is no means of electronic communication to the victim area, a local resident of the victim area Mr. Thilay Lama was approached who had just arrived Dhunche from Lamtang for personal cause. He informed that along with severe damage to 18 houses a local resident aged 65 years, the father of Kami Lopchang died due to the cold snow fall and also one year old daughter of Kami Lopchang died due to the same reason. The local administration did not buy the news that there had been death at all.

It is clearly observed that, out of the various agencies, GoN, the emergency response units such as Army/Police as the district chapter of NRCS have not been able to facilitate any support to these victims.

Need of the time

From the observation of the situation **SRDC** thinks Perigeo Onlus can think about the incident with the sense of support to the local people affected by the snow storm. Notwithstanding the growing demand for the quality lives at national level, the resident of this area are still struggling even to survive at basic level and are deprived of the fundamental requisites. The following suggestions are made for immediate and long term support in this community.

- Immediate support to the victims in terms of adequate nutrient foods, warm cloths, sleeping bags and reconstruction materials for the damaged houses
- Support to their children for IGA education and access to basic education and health facilities.
- Informal education and awareness at community level.
- Establishment of Disaster Prevention and Emergency Operation Centre at or near the langtang VDC.
- Implementation of pilot community level disaster mitigation program with association with GoN and Local bodies.

At this time now, the damaged houses have been repaired using the old and damaged tin roofing materials and locally available woods. Since this village is slightly out of the regular Langtang trekking trail, people are poor and backward.

Please note that this is not a very severe incident. In the Himalayas these are normal happenings. Just that people are so poor they can't cope with the situation. They are so poor that even when you give them money for school children, they use the money for some other purposes like food, etc.

The people at Dhunche said Tour agencies and tourists have been providing supports of all kinds to the local people but they do not understand the meaning of support and poverty never gets better. The poverty cycle remains. The poverty is so imbued in their mind.. and behavior.

Good thing now the road is going. Tourism is also going... new opportunities facilities such as hot water spring – largest in Nepal, the native type hydro plant, roads and trails.. Chinese goods are also coming from Kerung only one day walk from Langtang.

This is a closest trekking route for people like you from Perigeo.. try this season, if you can...

From the desk of
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24th Jan, 2012