

Report Part Title: Issues and Challenges in the 2015 Nepal Earthquake Response

Report Title: International Response to 2015 Nepal Earthquake Lessons and Observations

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Force in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake recounted how culture played a vital role in delivering health care, particularly when to perform surgery and with end-of-life decisions, among others. It was therefore important to establish communication with patients and families to foster trust and mutual respect for effective medical treatment.<sup>62</sup> In the aftermath of disasters, international medical teams need to understand the local medical culture and work closely with physicians and nurses from the host country. Ofer Merin et al. (2015) suggest that outside medical teams should be competent to deliver effective services to racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse patient groups. They recommend that the necessary information for foreign medical teams can be provided by a country team's embassy in the affected country, and by using translators, such as medical students, who understand relevant medical terms.<sup>63</sup>

These studies underline the need to pay close attention to the recovery of medical facilities after a large-scale disaster. They also emphasise that local norms and communication with patients are important to carry out effective medical treatment. It is imperative to engage with national and local actors and pay close attention to vulnerable populations, especially in urban areas. The reports also identified logistical challenges and the importance of matching aid to needs. This research aims to further understand the gaps and challenges in the immediate disaster relief efforts in Nepal through field-based research.

## Issues and Challenges in the 2015 Nepal Earthquake Response

One year on, the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake remains visible to all as longer term rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts remain unfulfilled. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the relief phase was extended by the Nepali government for an extra two months to September 2015 from the proposed timeline in the original flash appeal.<sup>64</sup> The World Food Programme (WFP), the lead agency for the Logistics Cluster, continued to wind down operations after one year (April 2016), and affected communities remain devastated by the destruction. It was in this context that humanitarian actors observed gaps and challenges in how the relief phase was

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<sup>62</sup> Ofer Merin, Avraham. Yitzhak and Tarif Bader, 'Medicine in a disaster Area: Lessons from the 2015 earthquake in Nepal', *JAMA Internal Medicine*, Vol. 175, No. 9 (2015): 1437–38.

<sup>63</sup> Ofer Merin, Avraham. Yitzhak and Tarif Bader, 'Medicine in a disaster Area: Lessons from the 2015 earthquake in Nepal', *JAMA Internal Medicine*, Vol. 175, No. 9 (2015): 1437–38.

<sup>64</sup> UN-OCHA, 'Nepal Earthquake: Flash Appeal Revision April–September 2015', news release, 11 June 2015, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/nepal\\_earthquake\\_2015\\_revised\\_flash\\_appeal\\_draft\\_a\\_s\\_of\\_11june\\_10h.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/nepal_earthquake_2015_revised_flash_appeal_draft_a_s_of_11june_10h.pdf)

governed and executed. The RSIS research team investigated the international response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake and how it was conducted through semi-structured interviews with international responders in Bangkok, Jakarta, and Singapore between February and March 2016. Interviews with local and international humanitarian agencies, non-governmental organisations, Nepali government officials, the Nepal Army, and community-based organisations in Nepal, as recipients of the international response, were conducted between March and April 2016.

This section aims to highlight some of the main challenges encountered in the immediate aftermath and international response phase so as to extrapolate observations and attempt a better understanding of how the Nepal Earthquake response could fit into the broader discourse of international humanitarian and disaster response. The issues and challenges faced by both communities and international responders fall into three broad categories: logistics; communication and coordination; and immediate response aid. In the following section, observations made by local and international responders on improving execution in the immediate disaster aftermath, and the implications of these experiences for the wider humanitarian community are highlighted.

### *Logistics*

The landscape of Nepal includes a mountainous terrain coupled with underinvestment in infrastructure, which ensured that logistics was a major issue both in terms of access to Nepal and within the country. There were a number of factors that led to logistical challenges becoming extremely significant. Nepal has only one international airport, Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA), which is situated in Kathmandu to serve the entire country. The airport became a major chokepoint despite the Nepali government's relatively quick call for international assistance within 3 hours of the disaster. Many international responders were only able to get into the country after 72 hours. To add to the difficulties, TIA is a relatively small airport with just one 3km runway and is only able to accommodate a maximum of 8 large aircrafts at any given point in time. This resulted in many international aircrafts destined for Nepal to be diverted to Delhi, Dhaka and Calcutta. The traffic and congestion meant many international response teams, equipment, and aid, spent many hours if not days waiting at various airports in the region before arriving in Nepal. The situation improved after a week, once air traffic control was in order and a system for quick off-loading of cargo was established on the ground.

However, logistical bottlenecks were not limited to the airport, but also extended to the transportation of relief items in and around Kathmandu. While most destruction and needs were

located outside the Kathmandu valley area, the majority of international responders and relief aid was concentrated within the Kathmandu valley area and its immediate surroundings. While the management of international response was already a challenge, this increased as more relief aid was flown in. However, this was not just a management issue for the Nepali government. It became clear that much relief aid was unilateral, with airplanes full of relief goods arriving and off-loaded without any prior notice on what the items were, whether they were needed, and who was supposed to collect and distribute them. This further choked an already fragile and overstretched system.

The second major logistical issue faced by international responders was the terrain. Many were unaware and ill-prepared for the natural environment, in terms its topography and, in certain cases, the altitude. Since the epicentre of the earthquake and areas with largest impact were concentrated in the Himalayan mid-hills region (between 700m–4,000m above sea level), this proved problematic for many. As a result of the difficult terrain, there was inadequate physical infrastructure, such as roads in good condition, to access disaster-hit areas. On many occasions road connections suffered landslides induced by the earthquake which completely blocked access to affected communities making aid delivery extremely difficult. Until the major roads and highways were cleared of landslide debris, helicopters and small aircrafts were the only means of transporting relief items and reaching those affected. The limited number of such aircrafts also constrained aid delivery and distribution in the immediate aftermath. For many remote areas without pre-existing road access, the services of trekking and mountaineering porters as well as animals were used to transport relief goods, further affecting the amount of aid that could be distributed.

### *Communication and Coordination*

Communication and coordination between humanitarian actors is frequently highlighted as one of the biggest issues in disaster response worldwide and Nepal was not an exception. However, significant advances in disaster communication and coordination have been made in recent years.<sup>65</sup> The UN and other humanitarian organisations developed protocols and mechanisms like the National Disaster Response Framework<sup>66</sup> and the United Nations Development Assistance

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<sup>65</sup> John R. Harrald, 'Agility and discipline: critical success factors for disaster response', *The annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 604, no. 1 (2006): 256-272; Dave Yates and Scott Paquette, 'Emergency knowledge management and social media technologies: A case study of the 2010 Haitian earthquake', *International journal of information management*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2011): 6-13; Louise K. Comfort, 'Crisis management in hindsight: Cognition, communication, coordination, and control', *Public Administration Review* 67.s1 (2007): 189-197.

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, *Nepal Disaster Response Framework*, (Kathmandu: Government of Nepal 2013), <http://un.org.np/reports/national-disaster-response-framework> (last accessed 1 August 2016).

Framework for Nepal.<sup>67</sup> Given that Nepal is one of the world's most disaster-prone and at-risk countries, the UN, under the auspices of UNDAC and OCHA, established a coordination system with the government of Nepal.<sup>68</sup> This system established a structure, and identified lead institutions such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, the National Disaster Centre, the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) as well as the Multi-National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC) which is operated and coordinated by the Nepal Army.<sup>69</sup> Many pre-disaster efforts and initiatives were activated in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. While the overarching UN framework was successful as most responding parties were aware of where and whom to report to, there were instances of communication and coordination breakdowns. These particular communication and coordination challenges fall into seven categories (i) UN and other humanitarian organisations; (2) military and civilian government; (3) coordination between the Nepali government and foreign militaries; (4) Non-government organisations and national authorities; (5) Nepali government and international responders; (6) aid donors and aid recipients; and (7) local and foreign media.

Firstly, while UN agencies coordinated around the UN cluster system there was reportedly minimal contact and coordination with other organisations in terms of aid delivery and distribution.<sup>70</sup> Other than working together with the WFP and the Logistics Cluster to assist with the storage and movement of aid and relief materials, many other humanitarian organisations worked alone. This was particularly notable with smaller NGOs which operated outside of the UN cluster system because there was limited awareness of the system or, in some cases, they actively opted to operate outside the system.<sup>71</sup> Secondly, parallel disaster response structures were created between the military and the civilian government, and as a result challenges emerged over mandate and jurisdiction. While air traffic control is covered by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), a parallel structure emerged from the military side. Miscommunication between the two reportedly led to a few near mid-air collisions and mishaps in Nepali air space.<sup>72</sup> It was not established whose instructions pilots and aircraft operators should be following, especially when instructions conflicted.

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<sup>67</sup> UN, *United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Nepal 2013-2017*, (New York: United Nations 2013). <http://un.org.np/reports/undaf-2013-2017> (last accessed 1 August 2016).

<sup>68</sup> Interview with official from UN-OCHA, Bangkok, 12 March 2016; and 'Nepal: Country Profile', UN-OCHA, <http://www.unocha.org/asia-and-pacific/country-profiles/nepal> (last accessed on 26 July 2016).

<sup>69</sup> For more information please refer to: 'Nepal Centre for Disaster Management', Government of Nepal, <http://www.unocha.org/asia-and-pacific/country-profiles/nepal>; 'National Emergency Operation Centre', Government of Nepal, <http://neoc.gov.np/en/>; 'Nepal Army's Operation Sankat Mochan', Nepal Army, <http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/sankatmochan/index.php> (all web addresses last accessed on 26 July 2016).

<sup>70</sup> Interviews with official from Nepal Red Cross Society, Kathmandu, 28 March 2016; official from Singapore Red Cross Society, Singapore, 6 April 2016; and Mr Ravindra Shakya, Country Director for Restless Development and Treasurer for Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN), Kathmandu, 30 March 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Interviews with Mr Ravindra Shakya, Country Director for Restless Development and Treasurer for Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN), Kathmandu, 30 March 2016; and official and responder to Nepal from Medicin Sans Frontier (MSF), Jakarta, 12 April 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with UN-OCHA official, Bangkok, 12 March 2016.

Thirdly, coordination between the Nepali authorities and responding foreign military teams emerged as an issue in the first week of the international disaster response. There were reported instances where all contact was lost with some foreign military teams and local authorities were unable to track their whereabouts. This led to some concern and apprehension for the Government of Nepal, until the authorities finally decided to allocate certain parts of the territory to specific international military teams. Similar to parallel coordination and communication structures for militaries and all other international responding agencies and organisations, there was also equipment and hardware which belonged to and were operated by different groups. While some of the aircrafts were shared, certain military machinery like forklifts, debris clearance tools, and some vehicles were strictly off limits for other organisations or the human resources to operate them were unavailable.<sup>73</sup> There were no mechanisms or guidelines in place for sharing such equipment among the various international responding parties during this period.

Fourthly, a common issue raised was the unclear and inaccurate information from affected areas.<sup>74</sup> News and reports from the government, media, and other organisations often conflicted and made it difficult to identify and assess challenges, particularly for humanitarian staff on the ground and those coordinating the response from outside the country. Remote management of disaster relief operations, especially with the advent and reach of digital and information technologies, has already been flagged as an emerging problem surrounding humanitarian responses.<sup>75</sup> The Nepal experience further highlighted the inaccuracy of information that such remote management depends upon. In addition to the conflicting needs assessment information, there were significant gaps in sharing official information and directives from the Nepali authorities.<sup>76</sup> In particular, changes in customs rules for aid materials or the use of UAVs were quick to be implemented but slow to be communicated to humanitarian agencies. This is also an issue which has been raised in numerous past disasters.<sup>77</sup> Many international responders also mentioned how such changes significantly affected their ability to plan and strategise relief delivery. Without proper and effective communication and coordination, there were some regions or disaster-affected areas which had multiple response teams while other areas had none. This thus resulted in duplication of effort in

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with responder from private multinational logistics company, Singapore, 15 April 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Interviews with Johann Annuar, Founder of Humanity Assist, Singapore, 22 March 2016; Official and responder to Nepal from Medicin Sans Frontier (MSF), Jakarta, 12 April 2016; Officials and responders of Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), Singapore, 22 April 2016; Responders from private multinational logistics company, Singapore, 15 April 2016; Official and responder from Mercy Relief, Singapore, 23 March 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Mark Duffield, 'The resilience of the ruins: towards a critique of digital humanitarianism', *Resilience* (2016): 1-19.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews with Johann Annuar, Founder of Humanity Assist, Singapore, 22 March 2016 ; Official and responder to Nepal from Medicin Sans Frontier (MSF), Jakarta, 12 April 2016; and Mr Ravindra Shakya, Country Director for Restless Development and Treasurer for Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN), Kathmandu, 30 March 2016.

<sup>77</sup> David Fisher, 'Domestic Regulation of International Humanitarian Relief in Disasters and Armed Conflict: A Comparative Analysis', *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 89, issue 866 (2006): 345–72.

some areas with communities receiving more attention while others were left wanting.<sup>78</sup> Another commonly cited issue was insufficient coordination or communication in aid delivery. Oftentimes goods were off-loaded at the airport without any information or instructions as to what the goods were or who was in charge of collection. This added pressure to an already clogged airport with many goods and items discarded to a corner of the airport complex.

As is common in a major disaster, the international media reported from Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake. As there were no clear guidelines on how the media should operate, members of the media moved about the disaster-affected areas without any coordination. Several instances of intrusion and disrespect to local communities by media were reported.<sup>79</sup> This perceived insensitivity by foreign media on the ground led to much criticism within the country. Social media campaigns were launched to generate more awareness about what was perceived as irresponsible journalism with calls for some foreign media to leave the country.<sup>80</sup> The Nepal experience showed deficiencies in strategic planning both by international responders and those based in Nepal. With the reflections and experiences highlighted above in mind, the management and coordination of international response have the potential to be significantly improved in future scenarios.

#### *Immediate Response Aid*

The international response to the Nepal Earthquake brought significant amounts of money, relief items, equipment, and professional expertise, which was critical to save lives and minimise suffering. However some relief was unsuitable and did not match the needs and situation on the ground, particularly clothing, equipment and machinery brought in for the immediate rescue phase.<sup>81</sup> As with most humanitarian responses the usual relief items were delivered to Nepal; this included food, water, shelter, blankets, clothes and hygiene (WASH) goods. There were obvious and important factors which were unfortunately overlooked. As Nepal had just completed its second harvest in late March – early April, basic foods were locally available with many households in rural areas having sufficient household food stocks. Thus food, though needed and useful, was not necessary to the extent that it had been prioritised.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Interviews with senior official, Ministry of Home Affairs and NEOC, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 29 March 2016; Official and responder from Mercy Relief, Singapore, 23 March 2016; and Official and responder to Nepal from Mediciens Sans Frontier (MSF), Jakarta, 12 April 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Southik Biswas, 'Why is Indian media facing backlash in Nepal?', *BBC*, 4 May 2015.

<sup>80</sup> 'Go home Indian media, Nepal Twitterati says', *The Times of India*, 4 May 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Interviews with officer of Nepal Army who also served as a liaison officer to various foreign international military teams, Kathmandu, 28 March 2016; senior official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 31 March 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with international responder for WFP Logistics Cluster, Kathmandu, 1 April 2016.

There were also some obvious sensitivities concerning food which were overlooked, for example some food aid included meat or its derivatives which also contained beef.<sup>83</sup> Nepal is a predominantly Hindu-Buddhist country where eating beef is considered taboo. This therefore led to a trust deficit and created avoidable food waste. Lastly, it was also found that some packaged relief food items had passed their shelf life and expiry dates.<sup>84</sup> Similar issues also surrounded medicine and medical items. Beyond expired items, shipments of medicine and medical items were received with labels or instructions in languages other than English.<sup>85</sup> This became problematic during use and distribution, especially when the medical teams were unable to understand the particular language or instructions which resulted in medicine waste. As April marks the beginning of summer in Nepal, conditions were particularly hot and dry during the emergency relief phase thus there was relatively little need for the blankets and warm clothing that had been sent.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, people in Nepal generally do not accept and use second hand clothing, so most donated clothes were of little use or only marginally accepted by the affected communities and populations.<sup>87</sup>

While there were cases of unneeded or unwanted relief items, the demand for tents and tarpaulin sheets overwhelmingly outstripped supply. Once this was realised, many responding agencies prioritised shelter, but over time, as many shifted their focus towards meeting shelter needs, it meant other relief goods like WASH items were completely ignored.<sup>88</sup> This too led to a mismatch and imbalance of relief and response. There was also a mismatch in the types of equipment and machinery which was brought for disaster response. A number of foreign military teams and organisations brought in the latest, state-of-the-art equipment for high-rise urban rescue.<sup>89</sup> Kathmandu was the only major urban centre affected by the earthquake with the majority of the damage in rural regions where most homes are made from mud, stone and brick, which meant most of this equipment ended up redundant.<sup>90</sup> In addition, there was equipment sent by donors that no one in the country knew how to operate. This then also became more of a burden than help.<sup>91</sup> Some transport vehicles, such as large propeller helicopters, could have been useful, but were not suitable for the terrain and local conditions.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with senior official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 31 March 2016.

<sup>84</sup> 'Relief food found to be contaminated', *The Kathmandu Post*, 9 May 2015; Lim Yi Han, 'Some Singaporeans donated items 'of no use' to Nepal quake survivors', *The Straits Times*, 6 May 2015..

<sup>85</sup> Interview with senior official, Ministry of Health and HEOC, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 31 March 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with international responder for WFP Logistics Cluster, Kathmandu, 1 April 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with senior official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 31 March 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with international responder for WFP Logistics Cluster, Kathmandu, 1 April 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Officer of Nepal Army who also served as a liaison officer to various foreign international military teams, Kathmandu, 28 March 2016.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with senior official, Ministry of Home Affairs and NEOC, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 29 March 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with international responders for WFP Logistics Cluster, Kathmandu, 1 April 2016.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, and interview with senior official from Nepal Red Cross Society, Kathmandu, 28 March 2016.

While it is necessary to have pre-existing disaster plans and exercises, the post-disaster reality is that these do not necessarily materialise into action in the form of a response mechanism, identification of key institutions, contact points/persons, and SOPs. There were numerous instances where the coordination role was taken up by ad-hoc groups and actors rather than pre-designated mandated agencies. In Nepal, this was most notably highlighted by the central role the military played in relief coordination.<sup>93</sup> However it was acknowledged that participation in international exercises and relationship building prior to the disaster was instrumental in the response as many responders were familiar with structures and the existing political, social, and humanitarian landscape of the country. Likewise international responders were also aware of the UN agencies, other foreign militaries and other humanitarian organisations likely to respond to the earthquake. This thus reinforced the need to have disaster plans and engage in exercise even though plans may not work as previously anticipated. Another key success reported was the existence of the newly established Humanitarian Staging Area within the premises of the Tribhuvan International Airport.<sup>94</sup> Its establishment significantly assisted in the organisation of the logistics and surge of international aid and relief into the country. Establishing such spaces in disaster prone areas and countries is now seen as extremely important as can be seen with the WFP development of staging areas in western Nepal, where another potential disaster is expected.<sup>95</sup> Similar staging areas are also now being established and operated in Djibouti<sup>96</sup> to serve disasters in the Horn of Africa, and in Kyrgyzstan<sup>97</sup> for Central Asia.

The logistical challenges faced in Nepal highlighted the need for back-up scenario planning for an international disaster response. It was fortunate that the solitary runway at TIA, the only air strip able to accommodate large aircrafts in the country, remained intact after the earthquake. In the absence of the runway at TIA, the international response would most likely have been operated through cities in India (like Calcutta and Delhi) or China (Lhasa) offering the closest international airports for aid to be delivered overland. This would reduce the time taken to reach communities and for the delivery of immediate relief, and reasserts the importance of neighbouring countries in disaster relief. This is not only due to geographical proximity but also their familiarity with the social, political and economic situation of the country in need. In the case of Nepal, the first countries to

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with UN-OCHA official, Bangkok, 12 March 2016.

<sup>94</sup> 'Nepal opens first humanitarian staging area, built with government and UK aid support', *WFP News*, 27 March 2015. <http://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/nepal-opens-first-humanitarian-staging-area-built-government-uk-aid-support>

<sup>95</sup> Interview with official and responder from WFP Logistics Cluster, Kathmandu, 30 March 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Leighla Bowers, 'Yemen: How is WFP supporting the humanitarian community', *WFP News*, 21 May 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Abeer Etefa, 'Kyrgyzstan operation gathers speed', *WFP News*, 23 June 2010.

come to its aid were India, China, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka; with some of the first response teams from India and Bangladesh delivering assistance to affected communities within the first six hours.<sup>98</sup>

The Nepal experience also revealed that uniformed groups (military, police, or civil defence forces) are often most effective in the initial stage of the response. This is due to their organisation, established command structure, and mobilisation preparedness; all of which applies to both domestic and international forces. However, there does need to be clear protocols and procedures on how disaster management responsibilities are eventually and ultimately handed over to civilian authorities. As was experienced in Nepal, this is important for aligning priorities and mandates, which was highlighted by the confusion over air space control and management. For international responders, one of the most critical and important factors which determined the effective and timely response in the case of Nepal was the position of the resident coordinator. It was observed that teams with a resident country coordinator significantly helped pave the way for that agency to start their work as soon as possible. The lesson for international response teams is thus to either have an equivalent of a resident coordinator or ensure early identification of a local partner. Foreign teams that arrived without prior arrangements in place or without a local partner, often led to additional confusion and mismanagement of time and resources.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, one consistent response during interviews was that “unlikely responders” had an important role in the immediate response and proved to be extremely important and critical. This included the private sector, business clubs, professional associations, volunteer youth groups, and even religious orders.<sup>100</sup> The local Rotary clubs<sup>101</sup> and Buddhist monasteries<sup>102</sup> were extremely resourceful in understanding the local community, identifying needs and victims, and negotiating access to them. Taking the effort to understand, identify and establish collaborations with such groups could prove extremely useful for responders in the future.

Some important lessons were also learnt from the perspective of Nepal as a disaster affected country. Rather than making an open call for international help, authorities in Nepal felt they should have set certain conditions or criteria and provided prioritisation. An example of useful conditions or criteria include a public announcement that all international response teams should (i) be fully self-sufficient (ii) have a resident coordinator or local partner before coming into the country (iii) have

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with officer of Nepal Army, Kathmandu, 28 March 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Interviews with senior official, Ministry of Home Affairs and NEOC, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 29 March 2016; Official and responder from Mercy Relief, Singapore, 23 March 2016; Mr Ravindra Shakya, Country Director for Restless Development and Treasurer for Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN), Kathmandu, 30 March 2016; and official from the Ministry of Health, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 31 March 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Interviews with Mr. Sunil Thapa, member of Parliament and former Commerce and Supply Minister, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 1 April 2016; Senior officer, Nepal Army, Kathmandu, 31 March 2016; official from Nepal Red Cross Society, Kathmandu, 28 March 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with official and responder from Mercy Relief, Singapore, 23 March 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

their own translator; and (iv) bring aid and relief that was greater than a minimum stipulated amount.<sup>103</sup> As a result of the earthquake disaster experience, the administration of Nepal learnt the need and importance of better monitoring of international response teams and the relief items. This would ensure that teams or responders do not go missing and also avoid duplication of effort. Furthermore, a system of registry or notification of relief items prior to delivery and shipment and only upon the approval of authorities would ensure the right aid arrives as identified in the needs assessment. The notification system could also operate as a portal to communicate the latest government rules and regulations. This would establish a mechanism to identify appropriate items and better utilise machinery and equipment. It would further enable strategic aid distribution and reduce traffic congestion which was a major challenge in Nepal.

From an operational perspective, the humanitarian response to Nepal identified the need for a unified operations room (Ops Room), which is a physical location where all humanitarian organisations, international response teams, foreign military teams and others could gather for a comprehensive overview of all operations and relief work. Such a provision can collate and disseminate the most up-to-date information, allow for collaboration if needed, and ensure that duplication is minimised. Finally, the relief effort also identified the need for a standardised SOP or broad guidelines on operational language, signal systems as well as selection and aid distribution criteria to take into account the social, economic and political realities of the affected area. This could prove useful and minimise the time required for all parties to conduct their own assessments and procedures. For example, the UN prioritised all Nepali employees stationed worldwide to be part of their response teams for the first time. In the post response assessment this was seen as a success and yielded positive results. It is now therefore likely that the UN will continue to adopt such prioritisation of nationals of affected countries in future responses.

## Implications for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

The humanitarian response to the Nepal Earthquake is now another chapter in the international effort to assist a country in need of critical support and help. This experience was deemed broadly successful with a number of elements cited as being especially useful: progress through the international community's better preparedness for response; the evolution of UN-led coordination which had put in place overarching command and coordination structures; and the establishment of a humanitarian staging area. It also revealed that some broader issues and problems still remained.

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<sup>103</sup> Interviews with senior official, Ministry of Home Affairs and NEOC, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 29 March 2016; senior official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 31 March 2016.