

Executive Summary

On 25 April 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal. Thousands were killed, tens of thousands were injured, and hundreds of thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed. A second major earthquake struck less than three weeks later.

Aid providers quickly responded. But developing effective plans for long-term sustainable recovery requires learning from relief efforts to date and understanding the needs

and challenges that lie ahead. The Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal (IRM) project contributes to this by assessing longitudinally five issues – aid delivery and effectiveness; politics and leadership; social relations and conflict; protection and vulnerability; and economy and livelihoods. This report synthesizes findings from a quantitative survey and qualitative research conducted mid-late June 2015.

The impacts of the earthquake

Housing destruction was widespread in highly impacted districts. Elsewhere there were pockets of severe impact. In our high impact districts, 86% of survey respondents reported that their house was destroyed or still uninhabitable two months on from the first quake. In many medium and lower impact districts, levels of destruction were higher than aggregated district level data reveals. The impacts were greater in rural and remote areas.

The scale of destruction was partly a result of the poor quality of housing in high impact districts. Most houses in high impact areas were made from mud mortar and collapsed, while the relatively few concrete and pillar houses were rarely substantially impacted.

The poor and farmers were most likely to have lost their homes. In high impact areas, most people are living in self-constructed temporary shelters. Schools were the most affected public infrastructure. The earthquakes had the largest impacts on the incomes of business people. The impact on farming was relatively low except where there had been, or were risks of, landslides. The impact on laborers was mixed: wages went up for some but others were laid off. Tourism was badly hit.

There has been little sales of assets; these were restricted to the sale of livestock. Borrowing has increased, in particular amongst those highly impacted. People are most frequently turning to relatives or money-

lenders for cash with few taking bank loans. Remittances have continued. There was little

labor migration in the two months following the earthquakes.

The aid effort

Aid distribution was initially chaotic leading to tensions. After the formalization of government mechanisms, relief coordination vastly improved, with District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs) and VDC relief distribution committees (RDCs) playing an important role. In general, government coordination mechanisms at the district level and below performed well. However, there were some limitations to these related to a lack of transparency and accountability.

The government was seen by victims as being the largest provider of aid, potentially because of the ‘one door’ policy, with all aid materials to be channeled through the government. Aid in the first two months largely focused on emergency relief. Cash went out but reached fewer people than expected and at lower levels than government policies state. There were vast differences across districts in who received cash. Delayed and partial distribution of government cash grants related to difficulties in the process of identifying beneficiaries.

There is evidence of substantial mistargeting of aid: both inclusion and exclusion errors.

Many in highly impacted wards in medium impact districts missed out. The government classification of damage at the district level seemed to greatly influence the number of organizations that provided aid and the attention that a district received. This meant that highly impacted people in less impacted wards received little aid compared to the less affected in high impact districts. Aid reached remote areas with those far from the district headquarters at least as likely to have received assistance as those living closer. It took time, however, for aid to reach remote areas.

Contentment with the government’s disaster response was mixed. There was higher satisfaction with the conduct of VDCs in allocating aid. People in affected areas were highly satisfied with the performance of Nepal’s security forces. Foreign agencies and NGOs received mixed responses. Dissatisfaction over beneficiary selection for government compensation was high. Two months from the earthquake, people still had many immediate needs, prioritizing they needed corrugated iron sheets and cash. Over time, cash will become even more important.

Politics and leadership

There were no significant changes in the role of political parties and their leaders since the earthquakes. There was little politicization of relief at the local level. Political parties were most commonly accused of having interfered in the outcome of damage and needs assessments, especially in medium

and low impact districts where assessments were more contentious. New leadership figures did not emerge after the earthquake.

Dissatisfaction with the role political parties played in responding to the earthquake was high. Constituent Assembly members

rarely visited earthquake-affected areas. The impacts on political preferences is unclear. The majority of people remained undecided on who they will vote for in future elections.

This may be a result of disillusionment with parties and politics. The performance of parties in responding to the earthquakes may affect future voting choices.

Social relations and conflict

Crime and violence were not major issues in the two months following the earthquake. Most people felt safe and few reported violence as having occurred. Social cohesion and intra-community solidarity at the local level, especially in rural areas, remained

strong or even increased after the earthquake. Resentment over damage assessments and beneficiary lists, and grievances related to resettlement, could lead to conflicts in the future.

Vulnerability

Lower caste and indigenous groups were not disproportionately affected by the earthquakes. They did not appear to be discriminated against in accessing most types of aid but they were much less likely to have received cash. They were also less likely to be satisfied with aid providers and less likely to think VDCs were distributing aid fairly. Structural inequalities and prevalent forms of exclusion and discrimination are likely to negatively affect the recovery of lower castes in the longer run. They face greater difficulties accessing credit. Where they borrow, it is much more likely to be from moneylenders who charge higher interest rates.

for men. Children and elderly were under great distress in many areas.

The displaced faced greater uncertainty and were more vulnerable to diseases, threats and exploitation. Many did not know whether they would be able to return to their land and could not plan ahead. Inadequate beneficiary lists may mean that households miss out on assistance.

Women did not appear to have been disproportionately affected by the earthquake and were accessing aid. There were no substantial differences in the perceived safety of men and women and there have been very few incidents of abuses targeting women. Nevertheless, some, in particular single and widowed women, faced risks and uncertainties that were not present to the same extent

Implications

There are a number of implications for those seeking to support recovery in earthquake-affected areas, structured around the following:

I. Improving aid distribution

- Utilize and improve VDC mechanisms for aid coordination
- Ensure assistance reaches high impact wards in medium impact districts
- Be aware of the dangers of individual targeting based on current assessments
- Develop mechanisms that allow for the sharing of cash and support across households
- Communicate government policies and plans more clearly

II. Key areas for future aid

- Focus on building back better
- Provide cash and access to credit
- Develop geological landslide assessments and resettlement plans
- Develop programs for the recovery of small businesses
- Have an extra focus on the vulnerable

III. Ongoing monitoring

- Continue systematic monitoring of evolving needs and patterns of recovery