

## **Brief report on Kutang Relief Coordination and Survey Mission**

**8-14 May 2015**

*From 8-14 May 2015 a Tsum Nubri Relief Center team was in the Kutang area of Manaslu, northern Gorkha to coordinate the influx of relief materials with expressed needs, support local distribution, and to undertake a brief survey of the damages in the area after 25 April earthquake. The objective of this brief report is to assist responding organizations in coordinating relief and reconstruction efforts in the area by providing ground based information on the current situation, needs, and challenges. The mission was supported by Khushi Hona providing flights, relief materials and support from Kathmandu.*

*TNRC team*

Nyima Samdup

Rune Bennike

*Local assistance*

Pema Dekey

Nela Sangmo

Luna Gurung

*Khushi Hona support team (Kathmandu)*

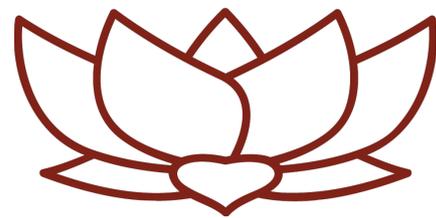
Matthew van Rooyen

Geet Sharma

Prabhakar Khadka



<https://www.facebook.com/tsumnubri>



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## **Introduction**

The major earthquake that hit Nepal on 25 April 2015 has left numerous casualties, great material destruction and many unfulfilled needs behind. Only a few days after the quake the Tsum Nubri Relief Center (TNRC) – an informal network of locals from the Manaslu area residing or by chance staying in Kathmandu at the time of the quake along with a few international friends of the area – began collecting, verifying and coordinating reports coming in from a wide network of friends and relatives in the area.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, the 7 VDCs of the Manaslu Conservation Area<sup>2</sup> has been spared of the large numbers of human casualties reported from other areas. Nonetheless, the area has seen substantial material damage to houses, institutions, infrastructure and cultural heritage. Not just in the immediate future, but over the coming months and years, the area will be in need of well-coordinated, locally anchored assistance.

As reports started pouring in, it quickly became apparent that the Kutang area (Prok and Bihi VDCs) represented a blind spot. With communication only available via one satellite phone located in Ghap, Prok VDC – cut off at the time by major landslides – getting good status reports from the area was problematic. With financial and organizational assistance from Khusi Hona, three helicopter runs were organized to the area on 8 May (Ghap), 11 May (Bihi) and 14 May (Bihi). The TNRC team flew into the area with the first helicopter and out with the third.

From the beginning, the objectives of the mission was to:

- Resupply the Ghap relief depot with materials for Prok VDC
- Supply relief materials to Bihi VDC
- Assist local representatives in organizing distribution in Bihi VDC
- Collect further damage and needs data from Bihi VDC

Due to time constraints and relative less supplies of relief materials, the mission focused mainly on Bihi VDC leaving distribution and further data collection in Prok VDC to the representatives in Ghap.

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<sup>1</sup> Updated status reports are available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ADTWkTcCP1ZUa-dAiow9f01smeGaesHka8cW6X8lb8/edit?usp=sharing>

<sup>2</sup> Sirdibas, Bihi, Prok, Lho, Samagaon, Chumchet and Chekkampar VDCs

## **Results and Observations**

### *Rescue*

We managed to coordinate the evacuation of a man with a complex fracture on his leg caused by aftershock-induced rock fall and two suspected TB patients to hospitals in Kathmandu and Gorkha. We found no-one else in need of immediate rescue in the area.

### *Relief*

At the time of our visit, households in the area were relying on often-meager stores of imported food supplies and local products such as Tsampa and corn for their diet. In many houses stocks of rice, lentils, oil, salt, and sugar were running low or depleted. In one remaining open shop, prices were reported to be about double the normal rate and stocks almost depleted.

The mission provided much needed medicine, shelter and food supplies to Prok and Bihi VDCs. However, given the current pressure on helicopter transport, we were only able to take a limited amount of supplies (about 1500 kg over the three helicopter runs). As long as the trail remains blocked by landslides, responding agencies will need to bring further relief materials – especially food – into the area and coordinate responsible distribution with local representatives.

On 12 May, a distribution of relief materials was organized in Bihi for all the settlements in the VDC except the southernmost village of Deng (app. 2 hours walk from Bihi). The distribution was organized by a local coordinating committee consisting of members from the VDC as well as the local youth club. Materials were distributed on a household basis with equal amounts going to each household. Each household received:

- 1 tarp + 1 roll of rope
- 1 pack of biscuits (containing 6-8 individual packs)
- 8 packs of noodles
- 1 guak (local measure) of rice
- 1 mana (local measure) of lentils
- 250ml of oil

The committee had decided to store additional relief materials until sufficient quantities were available to organize a second distribution. A distribution along the same lines were to be organized in Deng a few days later with materials dropped separately there a Nepal army helicopter.

*Material damage: Houses*

In the Bihi VDC, approximately half of the 211 houses are either severely or totally damaged, the rest have seen minor or no damage. Rebuilding is ongoing in quick pace. While the Tibetan style houses of stacked rocks seem quite susceptible to earthquake damage, they are also quick to rebuild. A team of about 10 people seems able to rebuild a house with minor damages in half a day. As evident from the table below, the damage has impacted the various settlements quite differently.<sup>3</sup> The May 12 earthquake did not seem to introduce and substantial further damage to the area

	Total damage	Severe damage	Minor damage	Totals
Deng	11	1	2	14
Rana	10	5	2	17
Krak	8	17	36	61
Tidur	0	1	8	9
Khatet	0	0	13	13
Krava + Rip	6	5	0	11
Chörtenpug/Goya	4	4	8	16
Bihi (estimate)	10	30	30	70
<u>Totals</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>99</u>	<u>211</u>

*Material damage: Schools and health posts*

The school in Ghap is totally damaged and in need of full rebuilding from the ground. The Namrung school is reported to be partially damaged. The school in Krak seems undamaged. The Bihi healthpost is partly damaged but a new one was under construction before the earthquake and its construction has been re-initiated.

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<sup>3</sup> These figures are estimates based on first-hand observation as well as conversations with representatives and residents. The survey team visited Deng, Rana, Krak, Tidur, Khatet, Krava, Chörtenpug Gumpa and Bihi. Due to time constraint, the Bihi figures are a rough estimate. The estimates for Goya and Rip are based on conversation with residents, not first-hand observation. The figure more or less adds up to the 2011 census total of 208 households for the area.

### *Material damage: Cultural Heritage*

Many mani walls and kanis along the trail and in the villages have collapsed. A small Gompa in Bihi containing the largest prayer well in the region has been severely damaged and is in danger of full collapse. The Chörtenpug Gompa is severely damaged and in need of reconstruction.

### *Material damage: Infrastructure*

The main trail from Deng (Bihi VDC) to Namrung (Prok VDC) has seen substantial damage. While many smaller landslides could potentially be cleared by locals without outside intervention, the clearing of 3-4 larger landslides and subsequent reconstruction/re-routing of the trail will need substantial support in terms of expertise and equipment. This is a primary and immediate concern for the local inhabitants as the trail provides the main (for many the only) channel of transport and communication throughout the Manaslu region). The reconstructed trail should be able to sustain mule and tourist traffic safely. Major landslides (described moving up valley):

- Just after Deng before Rana bridge. Minor alternative path below.
- Between Banrung and Ghap. Minor alternative path above.
- Just before Namrung. Alternative path via Namla

A further, medium-sized landslide was observed just before Rana. In Bihi VDC, the distribution committee had decided to use leftover relief supplies as compensation for voluntary labor put in by local residents for clearing the trail.

### *Needs and priorities*

With immediate relief in terms of shelter undertaken and food supplies being augmented by these and (hopefully) further helicopter drops, the first and foremost priority for people in Kutang and across the region is the reconstruction of the main trail. Re-establishing the ability to travel and purchase foodstuffs brought in by mules will provide the local residents with a much sought-for ability to help themselves in the post-earthquake situation. By September, the ability for tourists in the region to travel safely and provide income opportunities to local lodges, teahouses, guides and porters are also a further concern relying on a full re-construction of the trail.

Secondly, the cultural and religious monuments and centers in the region are of prime importance to many of the residents as is the reconstruction of Ghap school. These reconstructions will need a lot of support for skilled labor and materials.

Thirdly, and further ahead, the establishment of mobile communication services in Kutang is of great importance and would obviously support future disaster preparedness. A mobile tower above Bihi or Prok was already discussed before the earthquake. These plans should be brought forward again and implemented in the post-reconstruction scenario.

### **Challenges and Recommendations**

#### *Local conflict awareness in coordination on distribution*

In Bihi VDC, it was obvious that relief distribution was a serious concern. While the distribution committee is currently doing a very good job, they working in a very politicized environment marred by old conflicts. It is very important the future relief and reconstruction efforts work actively with the committee providing materials intended for the whole VDC. Quick airdrops in various places in the VDC run the risk of further antagonizing the community internally to the detriment of future cooperation and long-term reconstruction. Defaulting on formal local administrative structures for distribution and reconstruction without taking into account the political shifts that have taken place in the area since the last local elections 17 years ago would run the same risk.

#### *Handing over information and responsibilities from informal initiative to larger organizations*

As has been noted for much of post-earthquake Nepal, networks of individuals and small organization seem to have much faster at reacting to the crisis than the government and larger (I)NGOs. These efforts, however, have a limited capacity in terms of delivering relief materials and future reconstruction as also illustrated by the present mission. At the time of writing, it seems like the larger organizations are finally ready to take over the responsibilities. Although these organization follow their own procedures and experiences, it is our hope that they will be willing to reach out to and learn from the smaller, less formal initiative that have already been set up and working in the area. There is important knowledge to be gained from this, as many of the smaller initiatives have deep knowledge that is very closer to the ground – e.g. about cultural appropriateness, important local contacts and old political antagonisms. Please be in touch.