



# Are You Listening Now?

Community Perspectives on Communicating with  
Communities During the Nepal Earthquake Response

Margie Buchanan-Smith, Subindra Bogati and Sarah Routley,  
with Srijana Nepal, Sweta Khadka, Yamima Bomjan and Neha Uprety

**May 2016**



## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, the authors would like to thank the numerous individuals and communities affected by the earthquakes, in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Sindhupalchowk, who shared their experiences, views and insights with us. We have done our best to represent their voices, experiences and perspectives in our analysis and in this report. Any shortcomings or misrepresentations are the responsibility of the authors.

We are extremely grateful to Save the Children and to World Vision International for facilitating and supporting the fieldwork for this study, seconding staff to be part of the fieldwork team and providing vehicles during the fuel crisis. Particular thanks to Tara Bajracharya of Save the Children, and Ujjwal Amatya, Sarina Maharjan and Catherine Green of World Vision International. The team running the Common Feedback Project (CFP) in Kathmandu provided invaluable support and advice, especially Giovanni Congi, Romi Gurung, Ankit Khanal, Bronwyn Russel and Tenzin Sherpa. Thanks to the CFP for hosting the study team while in Kathmandu. Sonia Whitehead, Chris Snow and Theodora Hannides of BBC MediaAction provided very helpful advice on the fieldwork methodology at the design stage of this study. Nicki Bailey in the CDAC Network Secretariat provided valuable research assistance.

Since the study began the authors have benefited from the constructive support, guidance and feedback from the Steering Group members who provided very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this report: John Borton (independent), Andy Wheatley (DfID), Giovanni Congi (CFP in Nepal), Jamo Huddle (WVI), Rachel Houghton and Martin Dawes (CDAC Network Secretariat), Kai Hopkins (Ground Truth Solutions), Rafael Obregon (UNICEF), Katie Drew (previously Save the Children, now UNHCR), Sonia Whitehead (BBC Media Action) and Stijn Aelbers (Internews). Finally, special thanks to Rachel Houghton and Angela Rouse of the CDAC Network Secretariat for their unfailing support, insights and encouragement throughout the study, and to Martin Dawes for supporting dissemination of the findings.

In addition to the support highlighted above the CDAC Network and the Steering Group gratefully acknowledge the financial contributions from the following organisations, which made this research possible:

The logo for Actionaid, featuring the word "actionaid" in a bold, red, lowercase sans-serif font.

Financial assistance, and other support, does not necessarily mean that the organisations, or other Members of the CDAC Network, agree with the conclusions, recommendations or opinions expressed by the authors in this document. Readers are encouraged to reproduce material from this report for their own publications, as long as they are not being sold commercially. As copyright holder, the CDAC Network requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the CDAC Network website. Copyright the CDAC Network. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

The CDAC Network was founded in 2009 by a group of UN, INGO and media development organisations to facilitate collective work on making communicating with communities an integral part of emergency response. A cross-sector collaboration, today the Network brings together over 30 Member agencies from humanitarian and media development organisations, UN agencies, the Red Cross, faith-based groups, translators, technology providers, and those with expertise in mass marketing-type surveys. A full list of Members is available on the CDAC Network website.

This extended network comes with connections to the private sector, civil society groups, communities and national governments. The vision of the Network is of a world in which people affected by crisis are agents of their own response and recovery, and the Network seeks to enable communities' ability to connect, access information and have a voice.

### What is Communicating with Communities?

In the context of humanitarian action, communication with communities (sometimes abbreviated to CwC) refers to activities where the exchange of information is used to save lives, mitigate risk, enable greater accountability and shape the response, as well as support the communication needs of people caught up in conflicts, natural disasters and other crises.





# Table of contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
Table of Contents .....	4
Foreword.....	5
ExecutiveSummary.....	6
Are You Listening Now? Community Perspectives on Communicating with Communities during the Nepal Earthquake Response .....	12
1. Introduction.....	12
1.1 Background and Overall Aim of the Study .....	12
1.2 Filling Information Gaps about CwC in Nepal .....	13
1.3 Methodology .....	13
1.4 Structure of this Report .....	19
2. Contextual Overview: The 2015 Nepal Earthquakes, the Humanitarian Response, and CwC Initiatives .....	19
2.1 Background .....	19
2.2 Sociological and Cultural Factors affecting Communication in Nepal .....	21
2.3 Communication Infrastructure in Nepal .....	22
2.4 An Overview of CwC Initiatives .....	23
2.5 Overview of Findings from Other Surveys and Research .....	27
3. Fieldwork Findings: Affected People’s Information Needs, the Extent to Which they were Met, and How ....	30
3.1 Introduction .....	30
3.2 Information that People Wanted Immediately after the Earthquakes, the Extent to Which those Needs were Met, and How .....	30
3.3 Information Needs Seven Months after the Earthquakes, the Extent to Which those Needs were Met, and How .....	35
3.4 Local People’s Experience of Agency Consultations about Their Needs .....	40
3.5 Local People’s Impressions of Relief Distributions .....	41
3.6 Common, Preferred, Accurate and Trusted Channels of Information, by Population Group .....	43
3.7 The Usefulness of Provision of Information .....	47
4. Analysis of what worked/did not work, and why .....	49
4.1 The role for humanitarian responders versus government as providers of information .....	49
4.2 The information people wanted, the information they received, and what agencies were providing .....	50
4.3 Local people’s preferred and trusted channels and sources of information and information channels used by agencies .....	53
4.4 Reaching different groups: constraining and facilitating factors .....	55
4.5 Reflections on agency CwC practice in Nepal .....	57
5. Conclusions and recommendations .....	61
5.1 Conclusions .....	61
5.2 Recommendations for the way forward .....	63
Acronyms .....	68
Glossary .....	68
Annex 1: Fieldwork methodology and overview of analysis approach .....	71

## Foreword



**In much of the debate about communicating with communities, whether it is effective, lifesaving or ‘worth it’ as an aid response, a vital, if immeasurable, factor is often missing. And that relates to the human need, not just for information, but also for contact. To have someone to turn to on a host of pressing problems or fears that add to the burden of those trying to rebuild their lives. With this in mind Kumari B.K. of Fulpingkot Village Development Committee, Sindhupalchowk, Nepal was asked to record her experiences as a Foreword for this report.**

I got married when I was 16 and was eight months pregnant when the earthquake hit in April 2015. The earthquake was a disaster for us, both for mental and physical reasons. At that time, I often heard that a lot of women experienced miscarriages because of the earthquake. I even heard that the baby born after the earthquake would be born with deformities. I was scared thinking that what if such things happened to my baby too.

My house completely collapsed and our 14 goats were killed. My husband was not in the village, and I was afraid about my would-be baby. I was really in trouble and had so many questions in my mind. However, I had no idea who I should contact. My husband was working in Kathmandu as a labourer, so I went there and gave birth to the child. I am glad that the baby, Sumitra, was born healthy.

Living under a makeshift tent with a newborn has been challenging. It is hot in the day time and very cold at night. We have only one room in the tent, and my father-in-law, mother-in-law, my daughter and I sleep here together. When my husband returns he also sleeps here. I wish either the government or organizations did something on our shelter related problem.

I am worried thinking about my child, her health and getting the right food for her. I could go and work as a labourer, but most of the farmers have not been able to do anything and they do not have money to hire people. I would say almost the whole village has no work since the earthquake. So, we need some work or training to help us make a living.

We do not have a radio right now. It got damaged a few months ago. There are others who also do not have radios. It might not be possible for concerned authorities to provide information door to door because of the number of people. If information is to be provided by radio, it would be better if this happens at 6 am or before. Once I am up, I have no time to sit and listen.

Throughout these months I think it would have been better if there had been weekly meetings to give information and let officials know what we needed and what was worrying us. Looking back, I wish there had been more of this...

# Executive Summary

This study is a rare effort to explore the views and experiences of communities affected by the Nepal earthquakes in April and May 2015, to find out how and whether their information needs were met. It aims to fill a knowledge gap about the relative contribution of the efforts of humanitarian responders to communicate with communities in the months after the two earthquakes.communication activities.

## Aim, Scope and Methodology of the Study

The need for humanitarian responders to communicate with, not just about, communities in crisis is well recognised<sup>1</sup>. The assumption is that if people and communities affected by an emergency have the information they need, and the means to communicate, they can take more effective decisions about their lives. Humanitarian agencies and their government partners have slowly but steadily responded to the need to bolster humanitarian communication, sometimes in collaboration with media development agencies, as the case for more and better communication with communities has gained traction.

As a result, humanitarian responders are increasingly investing in ‘communicating with communities’, sometimes referred to as ‘CwC’. At the same time, however, there is a sense that the ‘added value’ of these CwC initiatives, and particularly how affected communities perceive them, is still often poorly understood. This study begins to fill that knowledge gap.

The definition and scope of communicating with communities is broad<sup>2</sup>. To be ‘do-able’ this study focused on communication as a form of aid, and specifically on the provision of information to communities. The Nepal Common Feedback Project’s (CFP)<sup>3</sup> surveys that preceded the study showed high levels of dissatisfaction amongst people affected by the earthquakes in Nepal: their information needs had largely not been met. This study explores why.

Fieldwork was carried out in five locations selected for their varying accessibility and contexts: three in Sindhupalchowk district, one in Lalitpur district, and one in Kathmandu. Affected communities were consulted about their information needs immediately after the earthquakes and seven months later (in November/December when the fieldwork was being carried out); what information they had received in these two different time periods; how they had received it; and how useful it had been. Qualitative participatory methods were used in focus group discussions (19 FGDs with a total of 248 people), supplemented by individual interviews (51) and key informant interviews (30). Communities were disaggregated by gender and age, and two marginalised communities included. The overall objective of the study was to hear the voices and to capture the perceptions of affected people. In other words, the starting point was their experience rather than an individual CwC project, or collective CwC initiatives. Consultations were also carried out with agency staff and other key stakeholders in Kathmandu and in Chautara, the headquarters of Sindhupalchowk district.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: the 2005 World Disaster Report (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2005); The State of the Humanitarian System (ALNAP, 2012); and Left in the Dark (BBC Media Action, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The CDAC Network defines communicating with communities thus: ‘In the context of humanitarian action, communication with communities (sometimes abbreviated to CwC) refers to activities where the exchange of information is used to save lives, mitigate risk, enable greater accountability and shape the response, as well as support the communication needs of people caught up in conflicts, natural disasters and other crises.’

<sup>3</sup> The CFP has three objectives. To:

- ensure coordinated and effective communications with affected people;
- ensure affected people have adequate information about the response;
- ensure a systematic common mechanism for collecting feedback from affected communities to inform decision-making at the cluster, inter-cluster and humanitarian country team levels and thus to promote ‘adaptive programming’.

## The Context

Nepal's topography and poor road infrastructure are a challenging context for communicating with affected communities, especially those in remote and inaccessible locations. A CwC Working Group was established in Kathmandu straight after the earthquake, the inter-agency CFP (noted earlier) was set up, and many humanitarian agencies and media development organisations launched their own CwC activities (and in some cases their own assessments). These activities included general communication and information dissemination, such as earthquake survival and behavioural change messaging (some of which pre-dated the earthquake); psycho-social support through radio broadcasting; the use of signage ('flex' boards) about relief resources provided by individual agencies; the distribution of leaflets and booklets (eg, on safe migration); help desks set up at distribution points for immediate feedback and information sharing; face-to-face communication through NGO social mobilisers; roving journalists at community level to track (and ultimately debunk) rumours and to provide information face-to-face. In all of this, humanitarian responders made extensive use of Nepal's wide network of over 400 functioning community FM radio stations.

## Fieldwork Findings: Affected People's Information Needs, the Extent to which they were Met, and How

Many affected people said that their main information needs straight after the earthquakes were to do with shelter and temporary settlement, how to access relief, and how to stay safe and survive aftershocks and any future quakes. These needs were partially met, although widely circulating rumours caused concern and confusion. Women in particular wanted information about future earthquakes that would make them feel safe and to help deal with trauma, but did not feel these needs were well-met. They also wanted health-related information, for example, on caring for children, older people and pregnant women after the quake. Men had practical concerns: how to treat the injured, and how to deal with the dead (including animals); they also wanted information about government support. Marginalised groups and young people had similar information needs. The latter also wanted to know when schools and colleges would re-open. In the weeks immediately after the earthquake the main unmet information need related to shelter, including how to access temporary shelter and materials.

Most information initially came from family members and friends over the 'phone. Mobile phone ownership and usage is high in Nepal. Subsequently it came from external sources, although less accessible locations were very poorly served with information. Information channels reaching men and women varied considerably. Men usually had better access to information about the external context and external assistance, from local government representatives and from discussions in teashops. Women relied more on personal contacts for information – their relatives and friends, as well as social workers and health workers. Where available and still functioning, radio and TV were cited as sources of information, more by men than women. Marginalised groups were generally less well-served with information, as were more remote communities.

Seven months after the earthquakes, in November/ December 2015, information needs had changed. The main information need was about government assistance, especially for permanent shelter solutions as winter intensified, and whether the land was safe to settle and cultivate. Although a lot of information was circulating about government assistance, some were rumours and contradictory information. This generated confusion about the support available and people's entitlements. Many felt that their information needs related to permanent shelter solutions were not met. There was growing concern about livelihoods and employment opportunities. Women wanted information related to the health and welfare of their families through the winter, and whether government would support them. Men wanted information about government loans. All groups wanted information about when public buildings would be reconstructed, especially schools, but this was an unmet need. Rumours about the possibility of future large earthquakes were still circulating, and were particularly frightening for the less well-educated and for those unable to access original sources in terms of understanding what this meant. Health messaging from various organisations, often broadcast on the radio, was quite widely received. Information about trafficking and protection was also widely received. There was much less demand for information from humanitarian agencies at this time, as affected people looked to government to meet their needs.

Information about imminent relief distributions usually reached people through their community leaders and local government officials. Only rarely had people heard about relief distributions on the radio, although agencies in Sindhupalchowk did use this medium. There were cases of people not knowing how to use the relief received, for example water purifiers and seeds of vegetables with which they were not familiar. This was more of an issue in remote areas which had less contact with humanitarian agencies. There was also a prevailing sense of resentment that 'other areas' had been better served with relief as well as concerns that the 'better connected' were better-served.

The most common channels of information were mobile phones, face-to-face communication and radio. Face-to-face communication was preferred and more trusted, especially for information that was more personally relevant as people sought to rebuild their lives and communities. This was most likely to come from known sources, from the VDC Secretary and/or Ward Coordinator for men, and for women from social workers, health workers and their neighbours. Radio (and TV where available) was credited with being accurate, and trusted for general information about the disaster and about assistance available, but was more likely to be heard by men. Women from marginalised communities struggled to understand the information they heard over the radio. Younger people had access to the widest range of information sources, including the internet and social media, particularly Facebook. Where they faced issues of connectivity many young people were prepared to travel to nearby villages with better network coverage in order to access the internet on their mobile phones.

The most widely reported benefit of information received was that it enabled people to get access to relief, mainly provided by aid agencies. The second most widely reported benefit was new knowledge around earthquakes. This included how earthquakes are caused and measured, how to stay safe, and the risks of people trafficking in the chaotic period after the earthquake. The third most widely reported benefit was psycho-social, where information helped people to feel calmer and safer, for example, where rumours were dispelled. Much of the behavior change information, for example, about health and sanitation, pre-dated the earthquake response although there were cases of women, in particular, gaining new knowledge.

### **Analysis of the Communication Efforts of Humanitarian Responders**

Affected communities looked first and foremost to government – officials and employees – for information and for support to recover and rebuild, although there was dissatisfaction with government's failure to deliver. Humanitarian agencies can provide information in the short-term about how people can stay safe and about relief resources that are available, but ultimately longer term solutions can only come from government. This implies that agencies must work more closely with government, to disseminate information and from a capacity strengthening perspective, to support government's outreach.

In the first weeks after the earthquake there was a better match between the information that people said they wanted and needed, and the type of information that humanitarian responders were providing, for example, about surviving aftershocks, than seven months later when much of the information that people wanted related to government support. Messaging about human trafficking and precautions to take predates the earthquake, but was appropriately stepped up in the wake of the earthquake as women bore the brunt of the disaster. Less appropriate was the content of some health and sanitation messaging, for example, using water purifiers which were regarded as inappropriate and unaffordable by many local people. CwC efforts played a role in meeting psycho-social needs, although many women expressed their need for more information and programming support to address their fears and trauma. Overall, agency monitoring and follow-up at community level was lacking, to know if and how the information they were providing was meeting the needs of affected people. Some agencies acknowledged they do not have the methods or know-how to do this.

There was a bigger mismatch between local people's preferred channels and sources of information and the channels used by humanitarian responders, than between information needs and what was provided by humanitarian responders. While local people valued mass communication – radio and TV – for general news and information, they expressed a strong preference for face-to-face communication and dialogue for information that was directly relevant to them and to their needs. But many humanitarian responders favoured radio broadcasting on the assumption that they were reaching large numbers of people relatively cheaply. This assumption deserves to be tested, especially in terms of reaching certain groups in the population, including women. Where agencies (international and national) had a strong presence on the ground, they were better able to meet people's demand for face-to-face communication, especially if spending time in the community was an organisational priority and was adequately resourced.

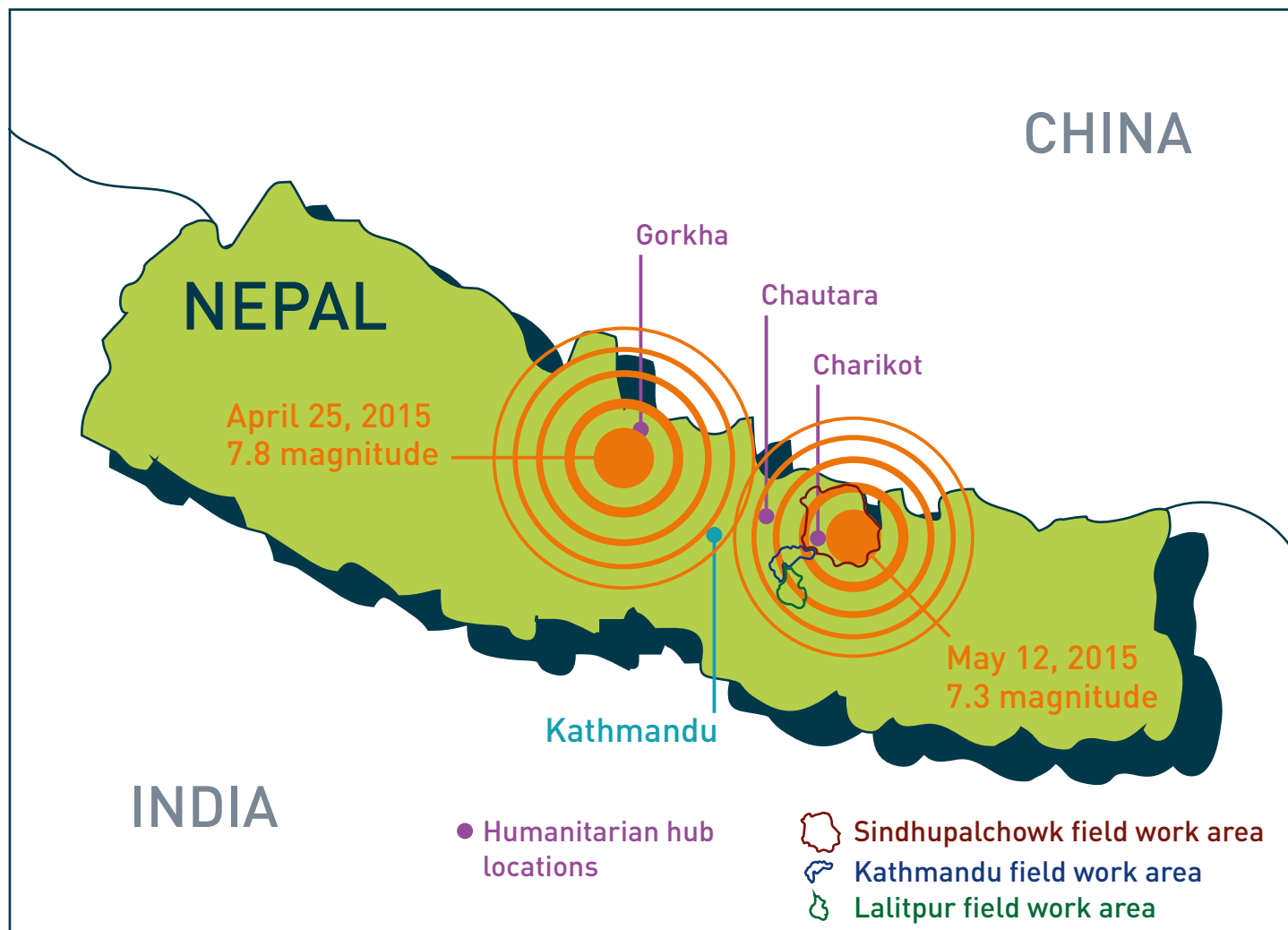


Inaccessibility in Nepal's mountainous environment was a major constraining factor in agencies' communication efforts, especially to engage in face-to-face communication at scale. But local people had suggestions about how this could be done, for example, through trusted individuals at community level such as health-workers and social-workers. Gender and generational factors are also important determinants: women and older people were generally harder to reach, especially by radio. Marginalised groups were also at risk of missing out on information available to other groups because of their lower education levels, and weaker networks and social connections.

Agencies generally placed more emphasis on the outflow of information and on messaging to affected communities – certainly the view of affected people themselves – rather than on dialogue as part of their commitment to accountability and listening at community level, with a few notable exceptions. Local people felt that they had not been adequately consulted by agencies about their needs, for information or relief, although there may be a difference in expectation between local people who expect to engage with agency staff directly, and agencies who feel they only have the time and capacity to do rapid assessments.

The CwC Working Group played an important coordination role. But in practice each agency has tended to develop its own CwC messaging leading to some duplication at district level. There were surprisingly few examples of media organisations partnering with humanitarian agencies, and evidence of tension between the two, indicative of their different organisational cultures. This needs to be addressed to realise the potential of these two types of organisations working together.

Some of the findings of this study resonate with the findings of earlier studies. For example, affected people's preference for face-to-face communication for information that is relevant to their personal needs and circumstances (yet agency practices prioritise delivering information through other, often more remote means, eg, through radio) and also how agencies struggle to monitor the effectiveness and impact of their CwC efforts. The findings highlight the need for more 'people-oriented' approaches to CwC that build on existing relationships and networks on the ground, and the need for agencies to spend more time listening to affected people.



## Recommendations

### 1. Collaborate with Government on Communicating with Communities

Humanitarian responders must collaborate more closely with government in their communicating with communities activities, as part of preparedness, response and medium-term recovery efforts

Affected people principally turn to government for information and to find long-term solutions to their post-earthquake needs. Humanitarian responders need to collaborate more closely with governments, at both national and local levels, in their CwC efforts.

### 2. Put the 'Human' Back into Humanitarian Communication

Humanitarian responders need to be more 'people-oriented' in their communications with affected communities, investing in more face-to-face communication

Humanitarian responders must not lose contact and connection with local people and their needs. This starts with good communication to ground the response, including the provision of information, and ensure it meets needs. This will positively influence and strengthen the overall relationship between humanitarian responders and affected people.

### 3. Strengthen Agencies' Communication Efforts to Reach All Population Groups

CwC initiatives need to understand, and take account of, barriers to information that affect certain groups

Different population groups have variable access to information, as well as different information needs. This needs to be taken into account in the design of CwC activities.

### 4. Improve Monitoring, Research and Evaluation of Communicating with Communities Activities

There is a need for improved and more rigorous monitoring, research and evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of communicating with communities activities

Innovation and practice in CwC is running ahead of monitoring, research and evaluation, which is needed to establish the effectiveness and impact of different communication activities and approaches. There is a need for more investment in rigorous data collection and analysis, based on consultation with communities, to build a robust body of evidence. Quantitative surveys that reveal 'what' is working well and what is not must be complemented with qualitative studies which help to understand the 'why'.

### 5. Recognise and Reinforce the Role of Communicating with Communities in Addressing Psycho-social Needs

The role of communicating with communities in addressing trauma and psycho-social needs should be reinforced and better support psycho-social programming

The findings of this and other studies show the valuable role played by communicating with communities in addressing trauma and meeting psycho-social needs. This needs to be recognised and reinforced.

## 6. Integrate Communicating with Communities Across Humanitarian Programming

Effective communication with communities needs to become central to the way of working; this will require an organisational and mindset shift so that communicating with communities activities are better integrated across the emergency response and within agency programming

CwC needs to be better integrated within programmes, rather than considered an 'add on'. This is not a technical change but requires a shift in organisational culture which can ultimately strengthen the relationship between humanitarian responders and affected communities, to more effectively support affected people's decision-making.

## 7. Promote Partnership and Coordination of Communication with Communities' Activities

There is a need to strengthen coordination of messaging and dissemination between agencies, and to strengthen partnerships between humanitarian agencies and media development agencies

There is a need for strengthened coordination to develop more common messaging, informed by research and dialogue with affected communities.

In addition, closer partnerships between humanitarian agencies and media development agencies, building on the comparative advantages of each, would ultimately strengthen CwC efforts – and support coordination of common messaging.

## 8. Develop Guidance for Aid Practitioners on Communicating with Communities

Develop a clear typology of communicating with communities approaches, information and channels, and guidance on effective communicating with communities activities based on the evidence and learning to date. Disseminate widely to field-level workers in national and international organisations

In the first instance this guidance should be developed for earthquake disasters, drawing on the well-documented experiences of the Haiti and Nepal earthquakes. Building on the findings and recommendations from this study, the guidance should provide an overall typology of CwC approaches and channels.



# Are You Listening Now?

## Community Perspectives on Communicating with Communities During the Nepal Earthquake Response

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background and Overall Aim of the Study

The need for humanitarian responders<sup>4</sup> to communicate with, not just about, communities in crisis is well recognised<sup>5</sup>. The assumption is that if people and communities affected by a humanitarian crisis have the information they need and the means to communicate they can take more effective decisions about their future in their own relief and recovery efforts. Humanitarian agencies and their government partners have slowly but steadily responded to the need to bolster humanitarian communication, sometimes in collaboration with media development agencies, as the case for more and better communication with communities has gained traction.

As a result, humanitarian responders are increasingly investing in 'communicating with communities', sometimes referred to as 'CwC, including experimenting with new technologies and media as they explore ways to better reach affected populations. At the same time, however, there is a sense that the 'added value' of these CwC initiatives, and particularly how affected communities perceive them, is still often poorly understood.

This study begins to fill that knowledge gap. It focuses on the international response to the powerful earthquakes that struck Nepal on 25 April 2015, and again two-and-a-half weeks later on 12 May. It aims to better understand what, if any, benefits and outcomes the many communication activities initiatives implemented in Nepal following the earthquakes have had for affected people, from their perspective.

This study has been commissioned by the CDAC Network<sup>6</sup>, a cross-sector collaboration that brings together over 30 Member agencies. Within the Network are humanitarian and media development organisations, UN agencies, the Red Cross, faith-based groups, translators, technology providers, and those with expertise in mass marketing-type surveys. This extended network comes with connections to the private sector, civil society groups, communities and national governments. For the purposes of this study, CwC initiatives have been defined as **'initiatives which aim to provide communities with critical information, and/or provide an opportunity for ongoing dialogue between humanitarian responders and people affected by crisis'**<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Humanitarian responders' in this context refers to humanitarian agencies and also media and media development organisations.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: the 2005 World Disaster Report (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2005); The State of the Humanitarian System (ALNAP, 2012); and Left in the Dark (BBC Media Action, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> The CDAC Network was founded in 2009 by a group of UN, INGO and media development organisations to facilitate collective work on making communications with communities an integral part of disaster response. To find out more, go to [www.cdacnetwork.org](http://www.cdacnetwork.org).

<sup>7</sup> As described in the original Terms of Reference for this study.



CwC refers to a wide range of communication activities between humanitarian responders and people affected by humanitarian crises, as well as between communities themselves, from communication where the provision of information to affected communities helps save lives, mitigate risk and inform decision-making, to feedback from communities about the response as part of agencies' efforts to be accountable to affected people and to adapt their efforts accordingly. This study mainly focuses on the former, ie, on communication to save lives, mitigate risk and help inform people's decision-making. It explores the views and experience of communities affected by the Nepal earthquakes in terms of how and whether their information needs were met, and the role of humanitarian responders in meeting those needs. In order to ensure the research was do-able with the available time and resources, we have focused particularly on 'information' as a sub-set of the broader concept of 'communication'.

## 1.2 Filling Information Gaps about CwC in Nepal

A variety of studies and surveys looking at local people's use of media, and how to communicate effectively at the community level, were carried out in Nepal before the 2015 earthquakes<sup>8</sup>, and especially since the earthquakes in terms of CwC assessments<sup>9</sup> and the 'Common Perception Surveys' (CPS)<sup>10</sup>. The latter were commissioned by the Common Feedback Project (CFP) and carried out by Accountability Lab and Local Interventions Group with support from Ground Truth Solutions<sup>11</sup>.

The aim of the CPS is to gather local people's views from the hardest hit districts on a monthly basis, providing insight for decision-makers over time on how communities perceive progress in the emergency response. Feedback from these surveys has consistently shown that a high percentage of respondents do not feel their information needs related to the earthquake response have been met, nor that they have been heard, although there has been some improvement over time.

The reasons behind these high levels of dissatisfaction were not well understood by agencies. Indeed, in Round 3 of the CPS, published in November 2015, the authors specifically say there is 'a need for further investigation and detailed questioning to fully understand and interpret the survey findings' (CFP, 2015c: 23). This CDAC Network qualitative study aims to contribute to that further investigation and understanding within Nepal. It also contributes more broadly to knowledge about the communication needs of people affected by natural disasters, and can thus inform both policy and practice on CwC amongst humanitarian responders.

## 1.3 Methodology

Originally conceived as a joint evaluation, it soon became apparent that this study was more research-oriented in its aim and approach. During the scoping phase a hypothesis was formulated to be tested by the study, out of which nine research questions emerged.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, BBC Media Action (2012); Internews and Interdisciplinary Analysts (2014).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, CwC Working Group (2015) and Internews (2015).

<sup>10</sup> See the CFP Progress Reports.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, CwC Working Group (2015); Internews (2015).

## Box 1: Hypothesis and Research Questions Underpinning this Study

**Hypothesis:** Communication provided to communities affected by the earthquakes in Nepal, by humanitarian responders, met their needs and enabled them to make informed decisions to support their survival, including preparedness to deal with aftershocks, and recovery, including accessing relevant relief services.

### The nine key research questions used to help investigate this hypothesis:

1. In the period since the earthquake, what type of information did affected communities need at different times to support their relief and recovery efforts, as well as preparedness for aftershocks?
2. To what extent were those information needs met at different times, and from what sources and in what form? (To also explore ease of access to information.)
3. What was the role of humanitarian responders in meeting those information needs, relative to other sources (eg, government, community networks etc)?
4. What were the main information gaps, and how did affected communities attempt to fill those gaps?
5. What has been the most useful information received, why, and what was the source and form of that communication? (This explores what was the most trusted, and apparently accurate, information received.)
6. How was the information received, used? What difference did it make to households' own relief, preparedness and recovery efforts, positive or negative?
7. How were the information needs of different groups in the population met differentially (eg, how were different information needs catered for, if at all)? How and what difference did this make, positive or negative?
8. If some groups were better served with information than others, what were the reasons, ie, facilitating factors? If some groups were poorly served with information, what were the reasons, ie, blockages?
9. To what extent was information received consistent and coordinated, or contradictory and confusing, and why?

The research for this report was carried out in Nepal in two phases:

- **First phase** (end October/early November 2015): consultations were carried out with agency staff on the ground (from humanitarian agencies and from media development organisations) and with other stakeholders, including local and national government officers and media providers, to get their perspectives on how well communities were served with information, and how well coordinated CwC activities had been.
- **Second (major) phase** (late-November/early-December 2015): research was carried out during three weeks of fieldwork in five different locations, in order to listen to and better understand the perspectives of the different groups within the affected population, in terms of their information needs, how well these were met, and their preferred information channels.

The five fieldwork locations were selected to represent different conditions that were expected to have had an impact in how well communities were informed in the days, weeks and months after the earthquakes. They were designed to capture differences, such as urban or rural, accessible or inaccessible by road and on foot, or how well served by communications infrastructure different areas were.

Because of the fuel crisis in Nepal during the period of the fieldwork for the study, locations were selected in the Kathmandu Valley and in Sindhupalchowk district to reduce travel time by car. Sindhupalchowk is one of the districts worst affected by the crisis, yet it is no more than four hours' drive from Kathmandu to Chautara, the district headquarters. According to figures compiled by the Nepali government and aid agencies, almost 90% of houses in Sindhupalchowk were destroyed in the earthquakes, and approximately 200,000 people were still living under temporary shelter seven months later<sup>12</sup>. There were also a range of conditions in Sindhupalchowk, from accessible and well-served Village Development Committees (VDCs)<sup>13</sup>, to inaccessible VDCs, which have been less well-served by the humanitarian response.

The locations where the fieldwork was carried out, and the criteria for selection, are presented in Table 1. VDCs were selected independently of humanitarian agencies and where they were operating, although some agencies have an operational presence in some of the VDCs visited.

**Table 1: VDCs Selected for Fieldwork**

Location (VDC) & district	Criteria for selecting location	Additional notes on location
<b>Boudha Camp, Kathmandu</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camp-based population</li> <li>• Urban</li> <li>• Accessible</li> <li>• No electricity in the camp though excellent radio, TV and mobile phone coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camp dwellers came from the worst hit districts.</li> <li>• Most had little or no social or family network in Kathmandu</li> <li>• High reliance on relief</li> <li>• Mixed ethnicity, but mainly indigenous groups</li> <li>• Agencies known to be present: US Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Noble Compassionate Volunteer Group (NCV), International Organization for Migration (IOM)</li> </ul>
<b>Khokana, Lalitpur district, in Kathmandu Valley</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peri-urban</li> <li>• Accessible</li> <li>• Well-served by communications: radio, television and mobile phone coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A village on the outskirts of Kathmandu in Lalitpur district</li> <li>• Badly affected by the earthquakes – approximately 600 houses collapsed and 855 families under temporary shelter</li> <li>• Livelihoods mainly agriculture dependent</li> <li>• Mainly Newari people</li> <li>• Agencies known to be present: World Vision International (WVI), Oxfam, ActionAid Nepal, Enfance Nepal</li> </ul>
<b>Fulpinkot VDC, Sindhupalchowk district</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less accessible by road (4WD vehicle required)</li> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• Well served by communications, eg, radio, and by relief agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-hour drive from Chautara (district HQ)</li> <li>• Radio coverage includes Radio Sindhu and Radio Sunkoshi</li> <li>• Livelihoods mainly dependent on agriculture and remittances</li> <li>• Range of ethnicities</li> <li>• Agencies known to be present: Save the Children, WVI, Phase Nepal, Shakti Samuha, World Food Programme (WFP)</li> </ul>

\*Table continues on next page....

<sup>12</sup> See <http://myrepublica.com/feature-article/story/33508/cold-kills-8-in-quake-hit-sindhupalchowk-in-a-month.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Village Development Committees are the local administrative unit under the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development. Each district in Nepal has several VDCs, similar to municipalities. Each VDC is further divided into nine wards.

Location (VDC) & district	Criteria for selecting location	Additional notes on location
<b>Sangachowk VDC, Sindhupalchowk district</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible by road (except Bhimtar ward, which is much less accessible and requires a 4WD vehicle)</li> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• Some wards in the VDC well served by communications and by agencies, and some wards not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-hour drive from Chautara</li> <li>• Radio coverage includes Radio Sindhu, Radio Sunkoshi and Radio Melamchi in parts of the VDC</li> <li>• Bhimtar ward: no electricity but has solar power</li> <li>• Livelihoods mainly dependent on agriculture and remittances</li> <li>• Range of ethnicities</li> <li>• Agencies known to be present: IOM, WVI, Save the Children</li> </ul>
<b>Baruwa VDC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inaccessible</li> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• Poorly served by agencies and communications, eg, radio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 -hour walk from Bhotang, which is a 5-hour drive from Chautara</li> <li>• High incidence of landslides</li> <li>• No electricity and weak solar power</li> <li>• Assisted by some private donors</li> <li>• Livelihoods dependent on agriculture and male migrant labour to India</li> <li>• Mainly Tamang</li> <li>• Agencies known to be present: Care Nepal, WFP</li> </ul>

Consultation with affected communities was carried out using qualitative, participatory methods. Seventeen focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with a total of 215 people<sup>14</sup>, along with 51 individual interviews, of which 30 were key informant interviews (KIIs). An additional two FGDs were carried out with 25 school children and eight teachers in the Higher Secondary School in Fulpinkot. A total of 299 people were consulted.



Separate FGDs were held with men, women, young people (mostly aged 18-25) and with two marginalised groups. The marginalised groups comprised a dalit community in Fulpinkot VDC, and a community of indigenous fishing people, the Majhi, in Sangachowk VDC. As a district, Sindhupalchowk has less dalit communities but more indigenous communities, usually with their own language and living in a relatively closed society, marginalised from other communities.

The FGDs were based on open-ended questioning and simple tools adapted from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods using timelines, mapping, scoring and ranking. FGD participants were primarily selected by independent contacts in the target locations to avoid agency bias. Agency staff assisted with FGD selection in two of the locations. In one location where it was not possible to do any advance preparation, participants were self-selected.

A 'methodology matrix'<sup>15</sup> was developed with the fieldwork team while in Kathmandu and field-tested in one location in Kathmandu. Several adjustments were made following this field-testing, including:

- the need to clarify the scope of information the research intended to cover;
- the need to frame the timeline exercise in terms of two time periods rather than three – 'immediately after the earthquakes' and 'now' (ie., seven months later when the fieldwork was carried out), with the third possible time period, 'during the monsoon,' no longer used;
- the need for the team to agree on clear and consistent ways of introducing the research.

<sup>14</sup> FGDs usually comprised 8 to 15 participants (on one occasion 20 participants).

<sup>15</sup> See Annex 1.



The PRA exercises were carried out using large flip chart sheets and stickers in an interactive way to facilitate deeper discussion. Annex 1 provides a summary of the questions and exercises. The PRA findings were analysed to identify the main issues raised and the frequency with which they were raised, and thus to identify patterns, some of which are presented as quantitative findings.

The results of the PRA exercises were interpreted in conjunction with the more detailed discussions in the FGDs, supplemented with the 21 individual interviews, to explore issues emerging from the FGDs in more depth. This included interviews with elderly people, as well as with younger men and women. An additional 30 KIIs were conducted with individuals with an overall perspective on the community, such as health workers, social mobilisers, teachers and shop-keepers, and with local government representatives, including VDC Secretaries<sup>16</sup> and Ward Coordinators<sup>17</sup>.

## Box 2: Key Topics Explored in the FGDs and KIIs

- Sources of information: how information was received and from whom; common, trusted, preferred and most accurate sources.
- Information needs: immediately after the earthquakes and 'now' (seven months later); main gaps.
- Information received: immediately after the earthquakes and 'now' (seven months later); main gaps and barriers; role of rumours; level of understanding or confusion caused by information.
- How information helped: positive and negative effects of information.

## Challenges

As already noted, the main challenge facing the study was its ambitious aims and broad scope, but limited resources and time in the field. This meant paring the study back to what was achievable, for example, focusing on the provision of information (as defined in Box 3) rather than the 'accountability dimension' of CwC, despite the interest of some CDAC Network Member agencies in the latter. This narrower focus was agreed with the study's Steering Group in October 2015 before the research methodology was developed.

### Logistical challenges

- The fuel crisis constrained travel to more distant locations from Kathmandu, as well as travel around Kathmandu, to meet with certain stakeholders. As noted above, the fieldwork locations were selected to reduce travel time by car.
- The VDC originally selected as 'inaccessible and poorly served' turned out to be well served and not as inaccessible as had been anticipated, so was replaced at short notice by another community, Yangri, in Baruwa VDC, which was three hours' walk from Bhotang, an adjoining VDC that was accessible by road.
- The fieldwork team had limited experience of field research or PRA techniques and limited understanding of concepts such as CwC or Accountability to Affected People (AAP). A period of familiarisation and field-testing was built into the initial phase of the field work to address this issue.

<sup>16</sup> VDC Secretaries are government civil servants and serve as the local interface and primary contact between the state and the citizens of Nepal. Their responsibilities include: administration of the VDC allocated budget for basic services and development projects; registration of births, deaths and marriages; management of voter lists; and tax collections. As there have been no local elections in Nepal since 2002, government replaced locally elected officials with civil servants.

<sup>17</sup> Each ward has a Citizens' Ward Forum of 25 members from different sectors, who choose the Chairman / Ward Coordinator. The Chairman / Coordinator is a representative of the ward and speaks on behalf of the ward. This is a temporary arrangement until local elections are re-instated.

## Methodological challenges

- The broad scope of questioning, and the need to gather rigorous evidence, made it challenging to design an approach that could be undertaken in a couple of hours with each group in a similar way, and repeated in all the locations. This required careful preparation.
- Given the diverse range of information received over time by the communities visited, and the abstract nature of the term 'information', there was a need to define what the study meant by 'information' and to reinforce this throughout the field research. See Box 3. (As mentioned above, the study focused on 'information' rather than the broader concept of communication to ensure it was do-able.)
- Although the focus of the study is information, some affected group members were more interested in talking about relief materials and services they had/had not received, and so had to be encouraged to talk about their information needs and how they had/had not been met. The team addressed this with a careful description of what was meant by 'information' and the scope of the study at the start of each FGD.
- The challenges of exploring behaviour change and other impacts of information that people had received were discussed at length with various members of the study's Steering Group. Advice was taken from BBC Media Action and several potential methodologies were discussed. It was finally agreed that it would be extremely difficult to get meaningful information on this in view of the broad scope of the study and other constraints, and that the 'usefulness of information' to affected people and their families would be explored instead.
- Attributing information received to particular sources and/or to agencies was difficult, although not unexpected, as the same information often came from different sources and/or local people were not necessarily aware of where it had originated. The methodology was designed to unpack details where possible, and to gather examples and case studies.
- There were language issues when talking to Newari women in Khokana. Although there was a translator, the women were reluctant to speak. In Yangri, Baruwa, the majority of the FGD participants also could not speak Nepali, so help was provided by a translator, but many people were still reluctant to speak.
- In one or two of the FGDs a strong voice diverted the conversation, so the facilitator had to keep the discussion on track.

### Box 3: Working Definition of 'Information' used During the Research

For the purposes of the fieldwork and to facilitate consistent translation, 'information' was defined by the research team as:

**Information about the help that was available following the earthquake, what to do after aftershocks, about how to stay healthy, protecting your family and keeping them safe, coping with trauma, about what help or aid was available and how to contact people providing it and ask for help.**

Care was taken not to limit information to that provided by relief agencies, and/or relating to aid and relief, or provision of materials. Some of the negative aspects associated with information provision were explored through discussions about rumours and some of the damage done due to inaccurate information.

## 1.4 Structure of this report

This report presents an overview of the CwC activities of humanitarian responders after the earthquakes of 2015, fieldwork results, analysis, and conclusions and recommendations. It is divided into five sections:

- Section 1 describes the methodology used in the study.
- Section 2 provides the contextual overview, as well as a summary of the findings of surveys that had already been carried out when this CDAC study began.
- Section 3 presents the findings of the fieldwork, in some detail to capture the richness and nuances of the perspectives expressed in the FGDs, PRA exercises and individual interviews. As far as possible, the findings are disaggregated by different population groups.
- Section 4 is the analysis of agencies' CwC efforts, what worked, what did not and why, based on the perspectives of affected communities.
- Section 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations for the way forward.

## 2. Contextual Overview: The 2015 Nepal earthquakes, the Humanitarian Response, and CwC Initiatives

### 2.1 Background

On 25 April 2015, a major earthquake of 7.8 magnitude struck Nepal, 77 km northwest of Kathmandu. Two-and-a-half weeks later, on May 12, there was a second earthquake of 7.3 magnitude, with its epicentre on the border between Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha districts, 76 km northeast of Kathmandu. Since the earthquakes occurred, there have been hundreds of aftershocks, more than 400 of which have registered 4.0 or above on the Richter scale.

Almost half the country – 39 of Nepal's 75 districts – was affected by the earthquakes. Fourteen districts in the Central and Western Region, including the Kathmandu Valley, were severely impacted. Nearly 9,000 people were killed, and almost 189,000 people displaced. More than 605,000 houses were destroyed, and an additional 288,000 houses were damaged (OCHA, 2015). Compounding the impact of the earthquakes was the seasonal monsoon, from June to September, with heavy rains triggering numerous landslides and causing additional loss of life.

In the previous years most preparedness measures had been oriented toward a major earthquake occurring in the Kathmandu valley. Thus, when the earthquakes hit rural areas hardest, the Nepali government was not well prepared to handle such a large crisis. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), ending a decade of civil war, had been signed in 2006, out of which complex power sharing arrangements between political parties emerged (ICG, 2011). These arrangements were not conducive to rapid and decisive decision-making. The National Reconstruction Authority was not launched until September 2015, and did not come into effect until December 2015, with the appointment of a new Chief Executive following changes in political leadership as a result of the new government. The belated adoption of a new Constitution for Nepal in September 2015, almost 9 years after the CPA, also sparked fresh protests by ethnic Madhesi groups in southern Nepal, and a trade blockade lasting for 135 days from end-September 2015 to beginning of February 2016 that hampered humanitarian efforts during the critical recovery and reconstruction phase, and triggered major fuel shortages. Finally, the absence of locally elected bodies and representatives further weakened the government's capacity at the local level to respond to the needs of its citizens.

The rugged, mountainous landscape and limited infrastructure of most of the earthquake-affected districts created an immensely challenging context in which to mount and run an effective humanitarian response. Settlements are scattered, many far from roads, and multiple landslides blocked many of the roads that do exist.

Initially over 4,000 military personnel from numerous countries joined the Nepalese government and its security forces to assist in search-and-rescue and other humanitarian efforts<sup>18</sup>. International humanitarian agencies have played an important role in the response, from search and rescue, to relief and recovery assistance, although they too have been criticised for how long it took them to scale up in the first days and weeks. Media reports at that time claimed that Nepal was awash with international relief aid which raised the hopes and expectations of quake survivors that assistance would reach them quickly, but in reality it took months to reach the more remote and isolated communities because of the logistical challenges (some of which had only just been reached by October 2015)<sup>19</sup>. During the days and weeks straight after the first earthquake, large numbers of Nepali volunteers, many from Kathmandu, stepped into the breach although struggled to respond to the scale of the disaster<sup>20</sup>. The remoteness of settlements in the hills and mountains made it difficult for aid agencies and government to reach affected villages with vital services. It was also very expensive as only helicopters (of which there are few in Nepal) were able to transport relief materials<sup>21</sup>.

Immediately after the earthquakes, international donors and government faced challenges in coordinating and working with each other. Donors had concerns about government capacity, particularly at the local level, to absorb the influx of relief resources in a timely and efficient manner. Government, meanwhile, wanted to ensure transparency in foreign aid mobilisation, and to maintain oversight of the allocation of relief resources.

The government established the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund. By early October 2015<sup>22</sup>, the fund had collected Rs 6,880,776,658 (approximately US\$63 million) for the affected population and for the reconstruction of physical infrastructure damaged by the earthquakes. The United Nations launched a Flash Appeal that rose to \$422 million after the second earthquake, for life-saving and protection activities, and to support resilience for a five-month period to October 2015. More 450 humanitarian agencies contributed to the relief effort, and three humanitarian hubs were established for coordination purposes.<sup>23</sup> International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are not permitted to implement directly in Nepal and instead must work through national and local NGOs, which are numerous.

The UN Flash Appeal and Action Plan had five strategic objectives, the fifth of which called for an inter-agency common service to ensure that affected people had access to information and were able to provide feedback, with the aim of promoting a more effective humanitarian response. Thus, communicating with communities, including accountability to affected people, was a stated objective in the international humanitarian response from the outset.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.pressreader.com/nepal/the-himalayan-times/20150510/281672548511821/TextView>

<sup>19</sup> See, for example:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/28/nepal-villagers-swarathok-aid-beyond-the-capital>

<http://aid.works/2015/06/nepal-haiti/>

<http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2015-06-26/spend-it-right.html>

<sup>20</sup> See, for example <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2015-04-30/youths-rise-to-occasion.html>

<sup>21</sup> The WFP UNHAS service was brought in, almost immediately, to provide logistical and transportation support. Networks of porters, mules and trekking agencies were also activated to help deliver relief items.

<sup>22</sup> <http://pmrelief.opmcm.gov.np/contributors.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> Humanitarian hubs were established in Gorkha district (Gorkha), Sindhupalchowk district (Chautara) and Dolakha district (Charikot).



## 2.2 Sociological and Cultural Factors Affecting Communication in Nepal

Nepali social structure is largely shaped by caste and ethnicity<sup>24</sup>. Recognising this is key to understanding the marginalisation of some groups, and who has, and does not have, access to information and sources of power and influence. Nepal is also a patriarchal society in which men enjoy considerable privileges and status, and women are more likely to be consigned to the domestic domain, especially in rural areas. This means that men usually have access to a wider range of information from different sources than women, and that they have preferential access to those in power. These themes underpin the findings of this study.

Community approval and 'fitting in' are strong drivers in Nepalese society (BBC Media Action, 2012). In practice, this means that people are wary of speaking out or contradicting the 'big people' (thulo mannche) in society. This can act as a constraint in communication, especially with more impersonal forms of media, for example, phoning into radio programmes. It also has implications for how agencies can reach women in particular, and encourage more open communication in general in safe and trusted ways.

Nepal's 2011 census recorded 123 languages (CBS, 2014). Nepali was designated the official language in 1930 and most written information is available only in Nepali. But literacy in Nepali is low among many ethnic groups, which means that language becomes a barrier in terms of access to information for those groups.

Traditional ways of communicating at community level have depended upon face-to-face communication and/or delivering messages through song. Examples include Katwal Karaune, Gandharva Gaune, Jhyali Pitne and Damaha Bajaune.<sup>25</sup> Although these traditions may still be used in some places, their significance has declined considerably due to the increased use of modern communications, such as mobile phones, radio and TV, and with the modernisation of Nepal's political system.

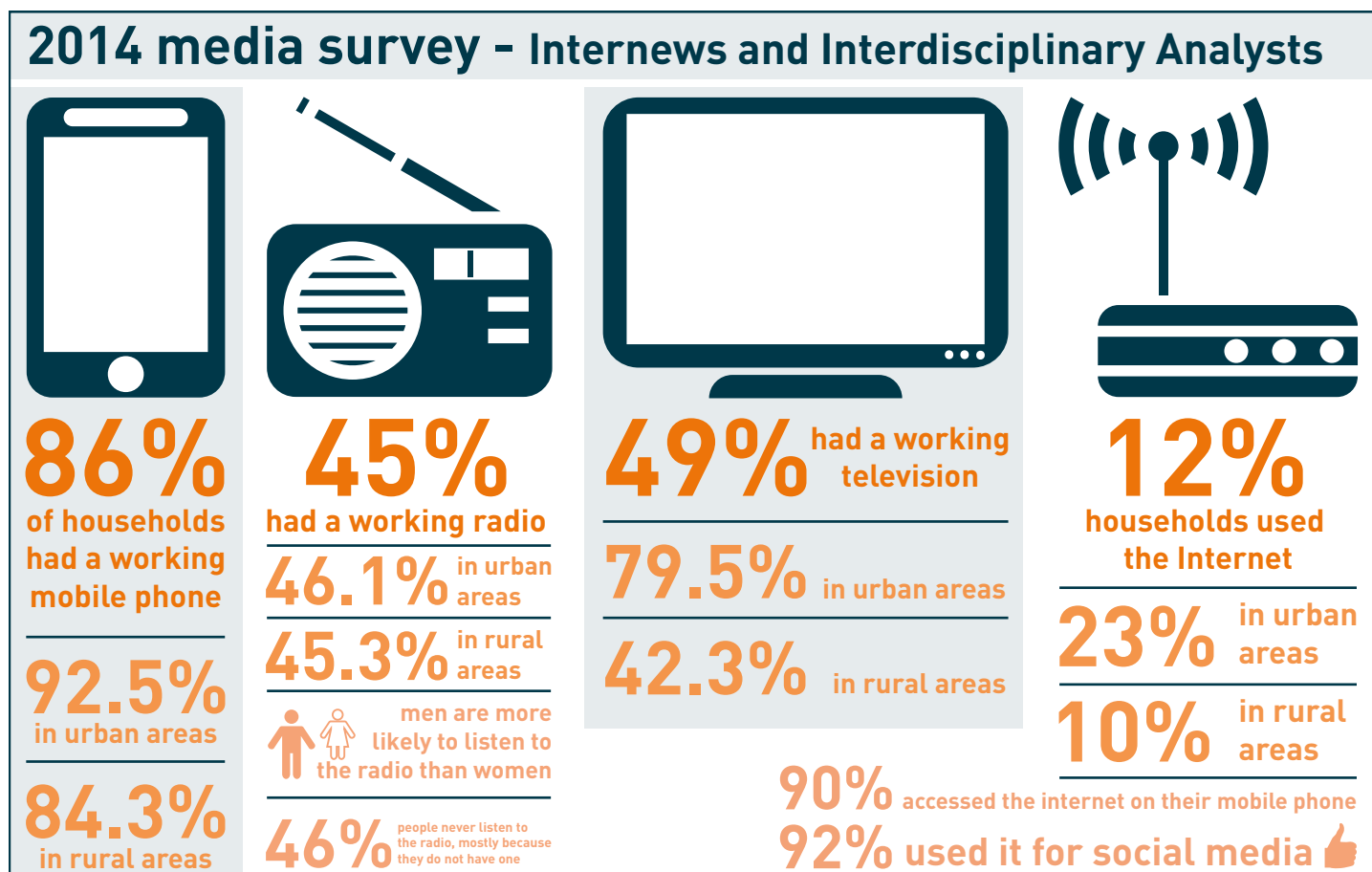
<sup>24</sup> The 2011 census recorded 125 caste and ethnic groups (CBS, 2011). The caste system defines social classes through a number of hierarchical endogenous groups often termed as "jat". There are four broad social classes or "Varna": Brahman (Priests), Kshatriya (Warriors / soldiers), Vaisya (Merchants) and Sudra (occupational groups). Within these four social classes or varnas, there are 36 caste groups including the dalits or 'untouchables'.

<sup>25</sup> These are various forms of communication based on shouting a particular message (Katwal Karaune), singing messages (Gandharva Gaune), gathering people with a drum beat (Jhyali Pitne) or by trumpet (Damaha Bajaune) so that a special announcement can be made.

## 2.3 Communication infrastructure in Nepal

The challenging topography and poor road infrastructure means much of rural Nepal is inaccessible and that groups in more remote locations have very limited access to markets, services and information. Mobile phone ownership and usage, however, is high and has become an important means of communication.

A 2014 media survey found that 86% of households had a working mobile phone (92.5% in urban areas and 84.3% in rural areas). A smaller percentage, 45%, had a working radio (46.1% in urban areas and 45.3% in rural areas), while 49% had a working television (79.5% in urban areas and 42.3% in rural areas). Only 12% of households used the Internet: 23% of households in urban areas and 10% in rural areas: almost 90% accessed it on their mobile phone, and 92% used it for social media (Internews and Interdisciplinary Analysts, 2014)<sup>26</sup>. However, not all rural areas have good mobile phone coverage, or radio coverage. The 2014 survey revealed that men are more likely to listen to the radio than women, but on average 46% of people never listen to the radio, mostly because they do not have one (Internews and Interdisciplinary Analysts, 2014).



Radio Nepal was established in 1951. From the 1990s onwards there have been major developments in radio broadcasting in Nepal, which is now regarded as a pioneer in the community FM radio movement. Its first FM station was established in 1996, since when small radio stations have been set up in the most remote rural areas (Frohardt, 2015). Nepal now has a total of more than 600 licensed FM radio stations, over 400 of which are broadcasting, some in the relevant local language<sup>27</sup>. As described below, these have been used extensively by humanitarian agencies for humanitarian messaging after the earthquakes. Despite the destruction of buildings and radio transmitters, many FM radio stations were back up and running within days of the first earthquake, often with external support. But many rural households lost their radios when their houses collapsed.

<sup>26</sup> The CwC Working Group's Communication Assessment in 2015 produced more positive statistics, showing that 94% have regular access to radio and 72% can regularly access TV (despite lack of electricity being a major barrier to getting information), but this was based on a relatively small sample of just over 200 respondents across 10 districts and was carried out in VDCs where participating organisations had a presence.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.moic.gov.np/upload/documents/fm-list-2072-08-14.pdf>

Overall, Nepal's mobile network infrastructure experienced limited damage from the earthquakes and relatively few people lost their phone service. When the earthquakes hit, mobile phone coverage was initially disrupted. This lasted for only a few hours in Kathmandu, although networks quickly became congested<sup>28</sup>. However, the breakdown in electricity networks and local hydro-schemes were more damaging as many people struggled to charge their phones. Nepal's two mobile service providers, NTC (Nepal Telecom) and Ncell, provided free local calls after the network congestion began to ease from April 26, while the Indian government also offered free calls to and from India for 48 hours starting the same day. Skype offered free calls to landlines and mobiles worldwide from Nepal for a month after the first earthquake. Viber, the messaging and Voice over IP app, offered free outgoing international calls from Nepal. Facebook's Safety Check and Google's Person Finder were also helpful in locating missing people and alerting those concerned to the whereabouts and status of loved ones<sup>29</sup>.

## 2.4 An Overview of CwC Initiatives

Within four days of the April 25 earthquake, a CwC Working Group had been established by UNICEF with OCHA support, indicating the priority given to CwC early on. (This is in contrast to the Typhoon Haiyan response where two separate Working Groups were established, for CwC and AAP respectively; they eventually merged). The CwC Working Group's objective was to agree messages across the clusters, and to promote coordination between partners on common materials (Sanderson et al, 2015). The value it placed on the importance of CwC was clear:

**'Information and communications systems are a life-saving form of aid in their own right, enabling individuals and communities to make decisions that protect their lives and livelihoods, access assistance more effectively, and express their needs and develop their capacities on their own terms.'**<sup>30</sup>

By June 2015, the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project (CFP) was established, in line with Strategic Objective 5 of the UN's Nepal Earthquake and Action Plan, which meant that its budget was included in the Flash Appeal<sup>31</sup>.

**The CFP had three objectives:**

- i. ensuring coordinated and effective communications with affected people;
- ii. ensuring affected people have adequate information about the response;
- iii. ensuring a systematic common mechanism for collecting feedback from affected communities to inform decision-making at the cluster, inter-cluster and humanitarian country team levels and thus to promote 'adaptive programming'.<sup>32</sup>

In practice the CFP became embedded within the CwC Working Group and associated with widely used and visible outputs including the periodic Perceptions Surveys, carried out by Accountability Lab and Local Interventions Group in Nepal and supported by Ground Truth Solutions. Weekly rumour tracking, carried out by Internews and its local partners through the 'OpenMic' project, was also facilitated and supported by the CFP. In addition, the CFP coordinated communication needs assessments and produced monthly reports that consolidated feedback from formal surveys and from agencies, for example, through their AAP mechanisms.

<sup>28</sup> See the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster Sit rep 1 of 25/4/2015.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.itv.com/news/2015-04-26/how-facebook-and-google-are-helping-track-earthquake-survivors-in-nepal/> and <http://recode.net/2015/04/30/seven-million-people-used-facebooks-check-in-feature-after-nepal-earthquake/>

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal/cwc-working-group>

<sup>31</sup> DfID provided \$400,000 for the CFP, in response to the Flash Appeal.

<sup>32</sup> See the Inter-Agency CFP final project document submitted to DfID.

Meanwhile many humanitarian agencies and media development organisations launched their own agency-specific CwC activities. Some focused on more general communication and information dissemination, for example, on earthquake survival and on behavioural change messaging, making widespread use of radio to broadcast these messages<sup>33</sup>. Within nine hours of the first earthquake BBC Media Action launched its Lifeline programme, broadcast through more than 200 community radio stations and 100 private stations. The programme had been prepared in advance with its content adjusted on a daily basis, and it broadcast six times per week focussing on practical survival messaging. UNICEF was another major actor in radio broadcasting, with programmes ranging from psycho-social support, for example, bringing counsellors into the studio and having a dial-in facility, to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) messaging around defecation and hand-washing.

A distinguishing feature of media is that it can be multi-directional, reaching many different audiences, from government to local communities, the private sector, and agencies. This study has focused specifically on how media reached and impacted upon local people, from their perspective.

As well as radio, humanitarian agencies used a range of other communication tools to reach affected population audiences. In the first months of the response, the Canadian government's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) used megaphones to play radio messages in some remote areas that had no radio coverage (Sanderson et al, 2015). Other agencies used leaflets, flyers and banners for their messaging. Some used street dramas (Plan International), songs (Christian Aid) and even a clown who visited schools and communities (BRCS)<sup>34</sup>.

While the earthquake survival messaging was mostly new, some of the behavioural change messaging pre-dated the earthquake, especially on WASH, safe migration and human trafficking. In some communities there were already signboards to indicate 'defecation-free zones', and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), for example, distributed a booklet on safe migration which had been developed and used pre-earthquake. A few agencies adapted their existing communication efforts after the earthquake: Save the Children adapted its messaging through the Suaahara project, which is aimed at improving the health and nutrition status of women and children in the longer term, to address earthquake-related needs expressed by its users, such as trauma and menstrual hygiene.

Many agencies focused their CwC efforts more specifically on the relief response. Signage (referred to in Nepal as 'flex boards') was widely used by humanitarian agencies, usually indicating the type of assistance the individual agency was providing to the VDC, in total, and per household, written in Nepali. ActionAid, through its partners, provided particularly detailed information on its 'Transparency Boards', including the total cost of the relief assistance it was providing, and the rice varieties.

A number of agencies interviewed emphasised the role of frontline relief workers in providing information to communities and in channeling feedback from communities. These were often 'social mobilisers' working for national NGOs but also included accountability officers and MEAL officers working for INGOs. Their main concern appears to have been the provision of information about the agency's relief distribution plans, including beneficiary selection. The extent to which frontline workers solicited feedback on the response varied from agency to agency. Other mechanisms oriented to address agencies' accountability commitments to affected people include help desks set up at distribution points, used by WVI for example, and at VDC offices, set up by Plan International in the locations where it was working, as well as feedback and complaints boxes (CARE set up 'complaints corners' at its distribution points). A few agencies set up hotlines, but generally found these to be very poorly used, with the exception of WFP<sup>35</sup>. Many agencies engaged in post-distribution monitoring, which was another opportunity to capture early feedback from beneficiaries, mostly related to the relief resources they had just received.

<sup>33</sup> A number of NGOs interviewed for this study engaged in radio broadcasting one to two months after the earthquakes had happened.

<sup>34</sup> The latter two examples are mentioned in Sanderson et al, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> From interviews with NGO staff. See also Sanderson et al, 2015. WFP's toll-free line, Namaste WFP, appears to have been more widely used, receiving more than 400 calls in its first three months of operation.

In the week following the first earthquake, the government set up its own hotline which was supposed to refer people to the district level authorities. It apparently received thousands of calls each day, but it is not clear what happened in terms of follow-up, and few of the calls were logged. The CwC Working Group tried to link with the government hotline, but this offer was declined as government saw this as their responsibility and preferred not to link with the wider humanitarian community<sup>36</sup>.

Two of the more innovative CwC initiatives in the wake of the Nepal earthquake are, first, the establishment of a Mobile Citizens Helpdesk, implemented by Accountability Lab and Local Interventions Group. This was launched within 48 hours of the earthquake, initially to help connect communities with relief as there were many private responders in the early days and weeks of the response. The project now has five volunteer journalists and a coordinator per district, in 14 districts, working at community level. The project has evolved so that it now provides daily reports on rumours and concerns, as well as feeding back directly to communities to dispel rumours and to help them access assistance.

The OpenMic project, run by Internews, is the second innovative CwC initiative, working in partnership with Accountability Lab and Local Interventions Group as well as others, to track perceptions and rumours circulating on the ground among earthquake-affected communities. This information is collated and analysed and weekly bulletins are produced with the objective of providing facts and debunking rumours before they do harm. Originally designed for the media to use, especially radio stations, the bulletins are now widely disseminated to, and used by, humanitarian agencies.

Many agencies carried out some level of community consultation with a few inter-agency consultations. Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF and WVI, in collaboration with the government, conducted consultations with children, both to inform their response and for advocacy purposes to ensure children's voices were heard (Withers and Dahal, 2015). And the CwC Working Group conducted a joint needs assessment of information and communication needs in September 2015. Some organisations, for example, the Nepal Red Cross, supported by IFRC, used social media, such as Facebook.

Table 2 presents a broad typology of these different initiatives, according to their overall focus.

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication, and Sanderson et al, 2015.



**Table 2: Overview of CwC Initiatives, Objectives, Communication Types and Agencies**

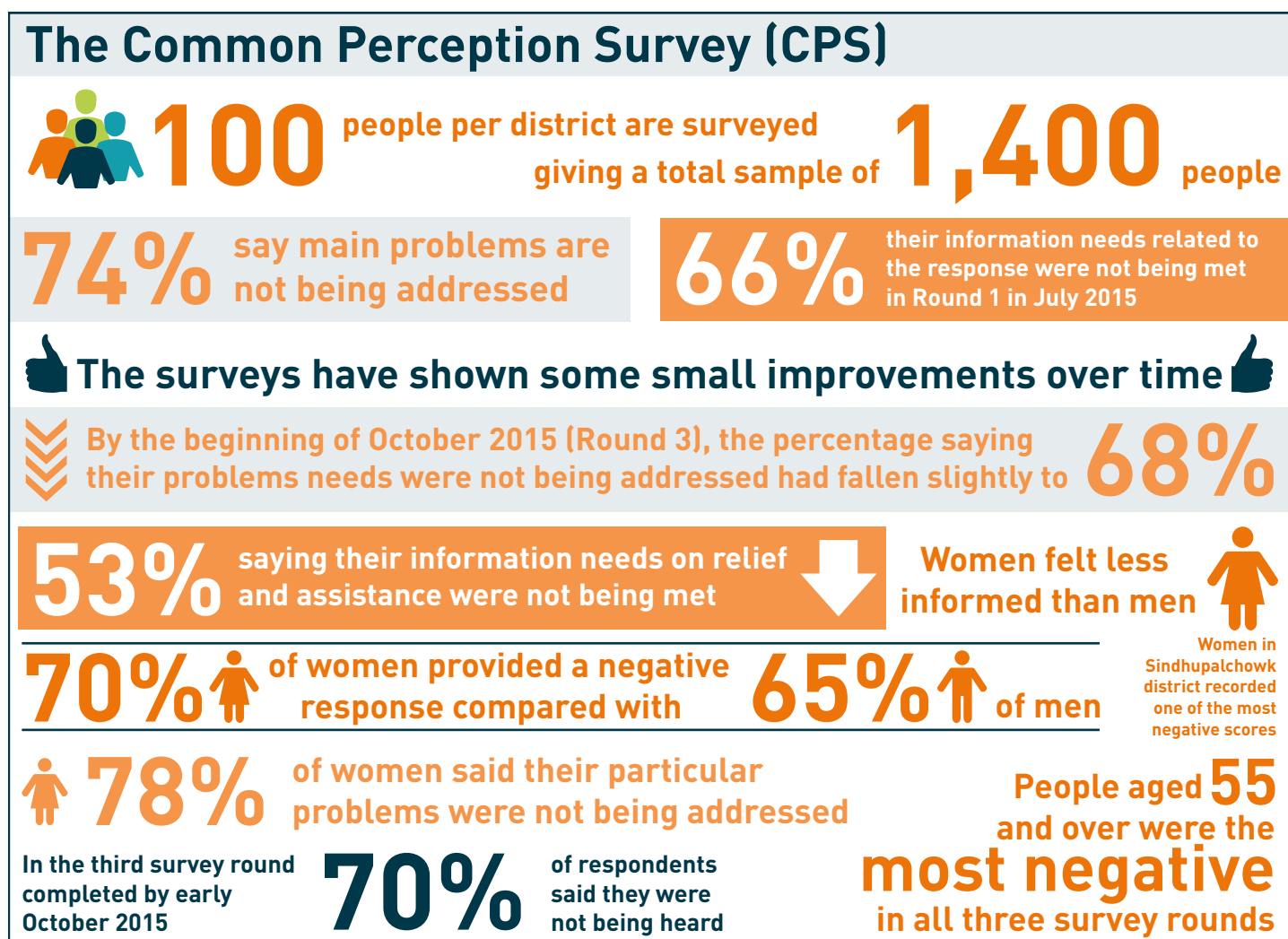
Type of CwC initiative, by aim	Broad objective	Modes of communication used	Type of communication	Examples of agencies involved
Emergency survival messaging	To provide information that could be life-saving	Radio eg, Milijuli Nepali, often with audience feedback mechanisms. Loudspeakers for public service announcements	How to survive aftershocks and earthquakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BBC Media Action Lifeline Programme</li> <li>• UNICEF</li> <li>• Canadian DART team</li> <li>• Nepal Red Cross</li> </ul>
Addressing behavioural change	To provide information to encourage longer term behavioural change	Radio, leaflets, social mobilisers, health workers, hoarding boards (also known as billboards)	<p>WASH messaging eg, on hand-washing, not defecating in open places, using water purifiers</p> <p>Protection messaging eg, safe migration and human trafficking</p>	Wide range of INGOs, local NGOs and UN agencies. Also BBC Media Action
Psycho-social support	To address trauma and reduce stress associated with the earthquake and aftershocks	Radio & TV programmes, sometimes with phone-in option Face-to-face	Meditation practice, messages encouraging people to stay in groups (family, friends, neighbours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNHCR and TPO</li> <li>• Tuki Association</li> <li>• UNICEF</li> </ul>
Dispelling rumours	To prevent the circulation of rumours that may be inaccurate, confusing, and/or dangerous	Internews OpenMic bulletins distributed through radio and TV programmes and to aid agencies	About government assistance for shelter, waiving of income tax / preferential application for visas, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internews, working in partnership with Accountability Lab and Local Interventions Group</li> <li>• Oxfam support to Radio Sindhu</li> </ul>
Information about agency relief programming	To ensure communities know about relief distributions: what, when, where, whom is eligible, and which agency is involved	Phone calls to local government officials and aid organisation focal points, signage (flex boards) at village level, radio broadcasts	<p>Information about imminent relief distribution – when and where</p> <p>Explanation of beneficiary selection processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widely used by UN agencies and NGOs</li> </ul>
Feedback from communities on their needs and how they are being met	For agencies to understand needs, and to solicit feedback on relief and recovery programmes so they can be adjusted to better meet the needs of affected people	Community consultations, surveys, help desks, toll-free hotlines, complaints mechanisms	<p>Affected communities can express their (dis)satisfaction about information provision</p> <p>Concerns about beneficiary selection also expressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CFP and Community Perception Surveys run by Accountability Lab, Local Interventions Group and supported by Ground Truth</li> <li>• Mobile Citizen Helpdesk run by Accountability Lab and Local Interventions Group</li> <li>• Inter-agency consultation with children, carried out by Pan International, Save the Children, UNICEF and WVI in collaboration with government.</li> <li>• UNFPA Perception Surveys</li> <li>• Help desks, hotlines and complaints mechanisms implemented by a range of NGOs and some UN agencies</li> </ul>

Some agencies provided support to the Nepali communications infrastructure as part of their CwC efforts. This ranged from the provision of radios at the household level (Nepal Red Cross and UNICEF), to financial and other support to help community radio stations re-establish themselves and get back on air (Oxfam with Radio Sindhu; UNICEF; International Media Support [IMS]) to training and mentoring of local radio stations (IMS; BBC Media Action; Internews).

## 2.5 Overview of findings from other surveys and research

Many of the surveys related to CwC that have been carried out in Nepal since the earthquakes have been formal quantitative surveys. Some were carried out in agencies' operational areas where they had particularly invested in CwC activities, while others were carried out across multiple districts. This section summarises the findings of some of the main surveys. Other surveys are referred to in later sections.

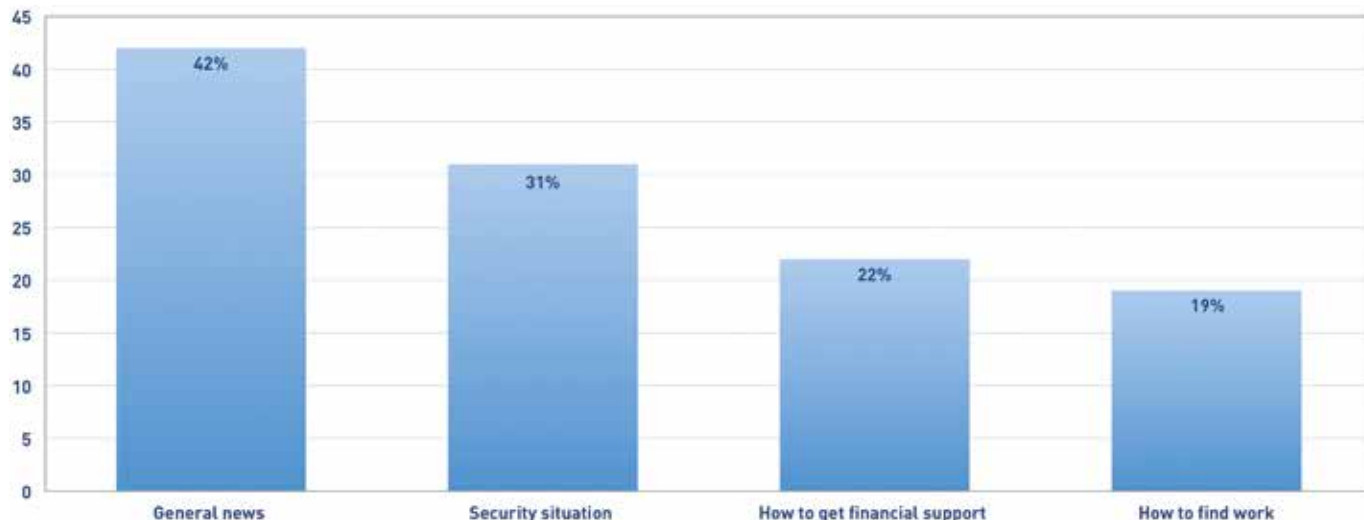
The Common Perception Survey (CPS) findings are representative at the national level but indicative at the regional level due to the sample size<sup>37</sup>: around 100 people per district are surveyed, giving a total sample of 1,400 people. Overall, the CPSs have shown high levels of dissatisfaction with the overall response with 74% saying their main problems were not being addressed, and 66% saying their information needs related to the response were not being met either in Round 1 in July 2015. The surveys have shown some small improvements over time. By the beginning of October 2015 (Round 3), the percentage saying their problems needs were not being addressed had fallen slightly to 68%, with 53% saying their information needs on relief and assistance were not being met. Women felt less informed than men: 70% of women provided a negative response compared to 65% of men. Women in Sindhupalchowk district recorded one of the most negative scores: 78% of women said their particular problems were not being addressed. In the third survey round completed by early October 2015, 70% of respondents said they were not being heard, with Sindhupalchowk again recording one of the most negative scores. People aged 55 and over were the most negative in all three survey rounds.



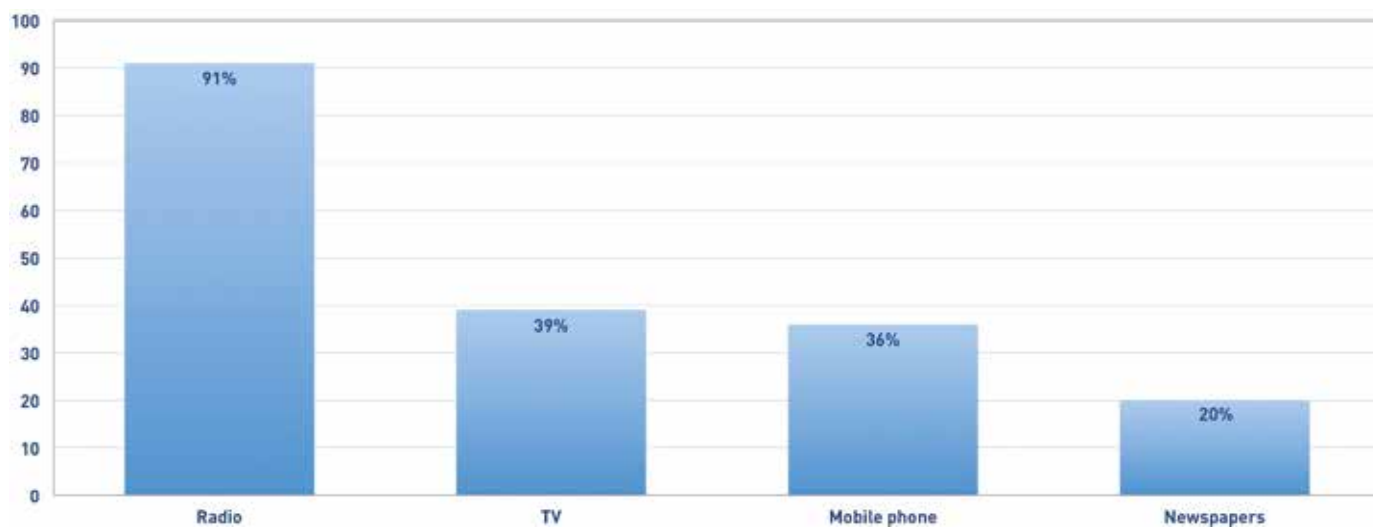
<sup>37</sup> As advised in the CPS reports. Respondents are asked to score nine questions on a scale of 1 to 5, depending on whether they agree with the statement; completely, mostly, neutral, very little, or not at all.

The top two issues on which respondents consistently said they needed information were 'news about government decisions' and 'how to get shelter materials'. 'How to register for and/or access support', 'healthcare' and 'the need for psycho-social support' were also all stated as significant concerns. Women said their biggest problems were long-term shelter and financial support throughout the three survey rounds, and healthcare was also mentioned as a top priority in some districts.

BBC Media Action launched a mobile phone survey in August 2015 to identify people's information needs, media perceptions and livelihoods, with a total of 190 respondents in Sindhupalchowk and Gorkha districts. Respondents said that their main information needs were:

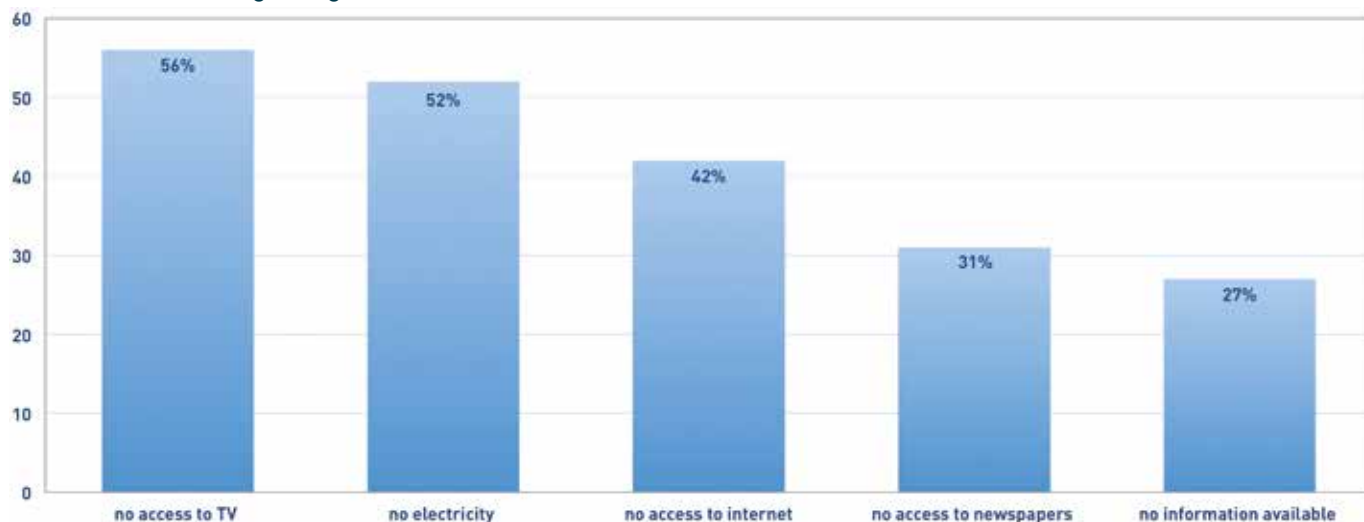


They said their main sources of information were



83% said Radio was their most trusted source

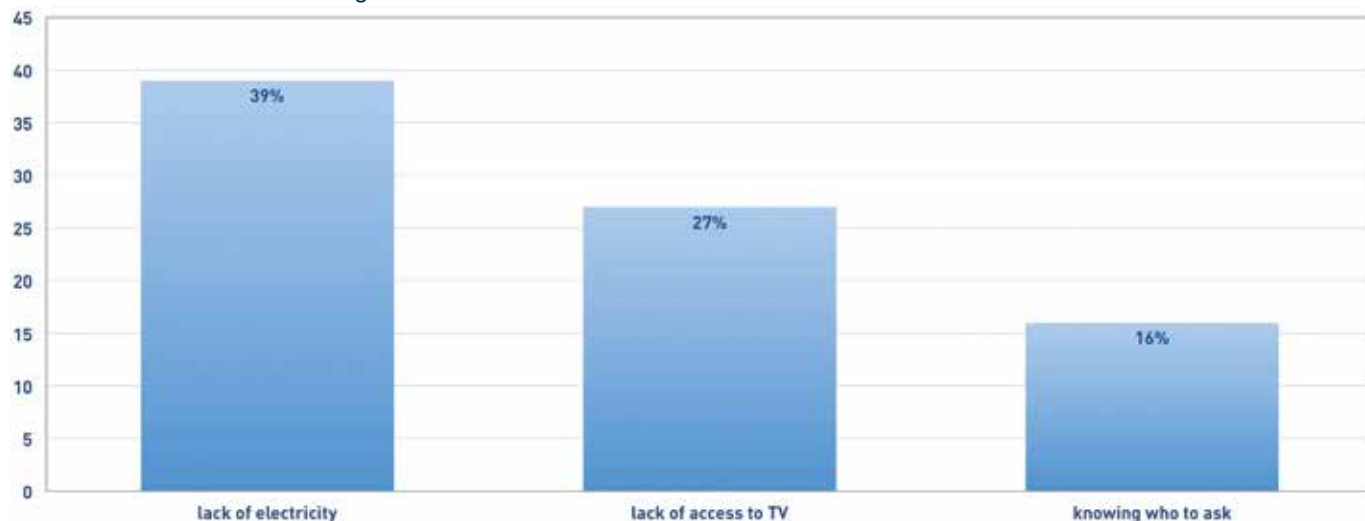
The main barriers to getting information were:



Multi-country research carried out by BBC Media Action, which included a case study on Nepal, reveals some interesting findings about mass media humanitarian broadcasting<sup>38</sup>, for example that it can be useful for practical life-saving information that can be universally applied, and has some positive psychosocial impacts, such as helping people feel more connected with others going through the same experience. It also highlights the need for localised, context-specific information from other sources, and how people place high value on information they can trust, but that trust can be lost or gained very quickly (Hannides, 2015).

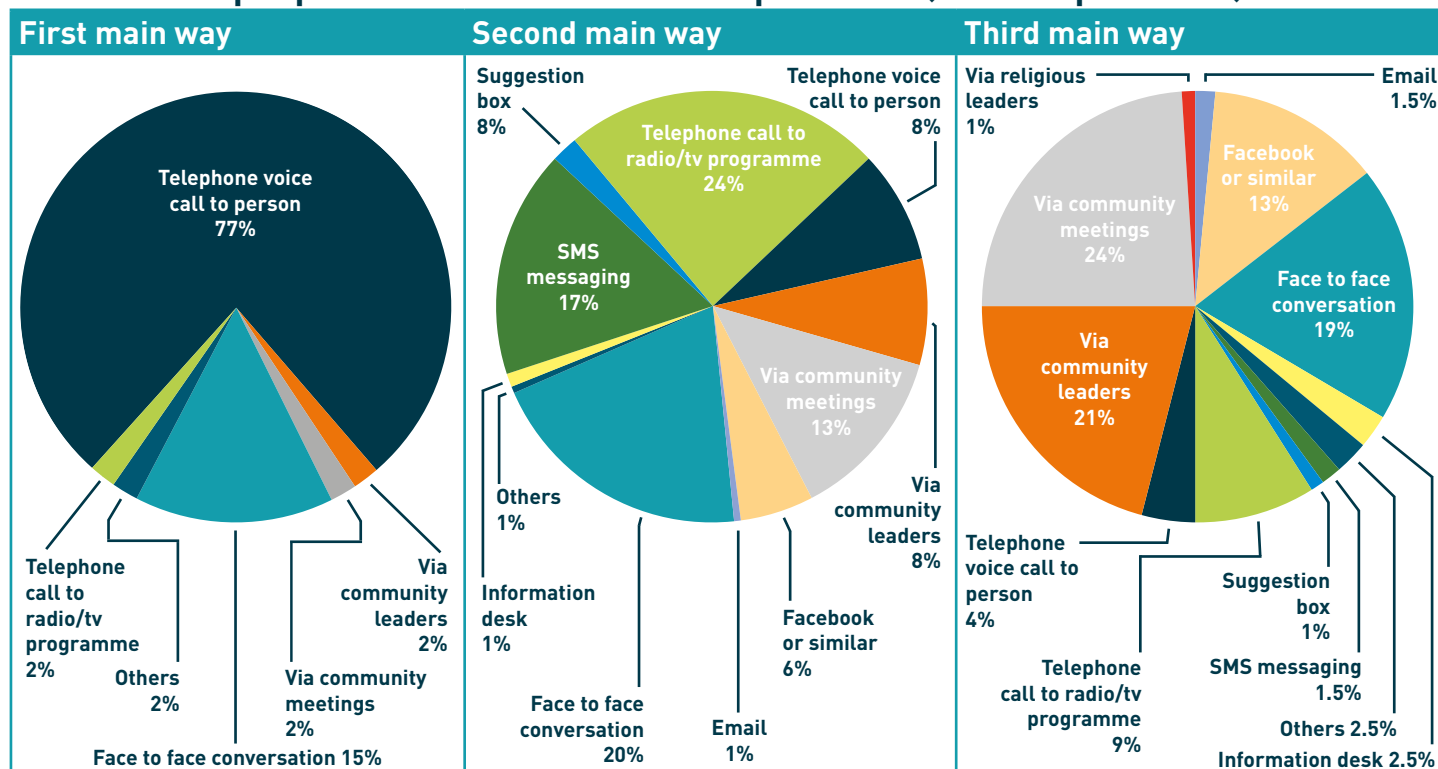
A coordinated needs assessment was carried out between July and August 2015 by the CFP and the CwC Working Group. A total of 222 KIIs were carried out across 10 affected districts, all in VDCs where organisations participating in the assessment had a presence. This showed an overwhelming preference for the use of radio and TV: 43% of respondents said TV was their first source of information and 40% said radio. Mobile phones and community leaders were also mentioned as sources of information.

The main barriers to receiving information were:



73% of respondents said they frequently or sometimes communicated with aid providers; 18% said they were not able to. The main ways in which people communicated with aid providers were further explored, and the results are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: How people communicated with aid providers (% of respondents)**



Source: CwC Working Group (2015)

<sup>38</sup> BBC Media Action defines mass communication programming as 'broadcasting that can reach millions of people when disaster strikes – informing them about what has happened, what to do, how to find missing loved ones and how to protect themselves and their families during the crisis' (Hannides, 2015: 5).

## 3. Fieldwork findings: Affected People's Information Needs, the Extent to Which They Were Met, and How

### 3.1 Introduction

By the time this study was carried out it was clear that, despite the investment in CwC initiatives by humanitarian responders, affected people did not feel their information needs had been met, with consistently high levels of dissatisfaction reported in the CPS.

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which has been an opportunity to use qualitative research methods to dig deeper and to try understand why there was such deep dissatisfaction.

The findings are divided into six sections:

- **Section 3.2** presents findings about the information needs of different groups within the population immediately after the earthquakes, the extent to which those needs were met, and how.
- **Section 3.3** present findings about the information needs of different groups within the population at the time of the fieldwork seven months after the earthquakes, the extent those needs were met, and how.
- **Section 3.4** looks at local people's experiences with agency consultations about their needs.
- **Section 3.5** briefly explores local people's general impressions of relief distributions.
- **Section 3.6** explores the common, preferred, accurate and trusted information sources for different population groups.
- **Section 3.7** captures how people described the usefulness of the information they received.

### 3.2 Information that people wanted immediately after the earthquakes, the extent to which those needs were met, and how

#### Box 4: Summary of key findings

- The main information needs were around shelter and temporary settlement: how to access relief, and how to stay safe and survive aftershocks and any future earthquake. These needs were partially met.
- Women particularly wanted information about future earthquakes that would make them feel safe and to help them deal with trauma, but did not feel these needs were well met.
- Men were initially concerned with practical information, such as how to treat the injured, and how to deal with the dead (including animals), but also wanted information about government support.
- The main unmet information need was shelter, including how to access temporary shelter and materials.
- In the days immediately following the earthquakes, mobile phones were a critical means of communication, especially with friends and family.
- The sources of information used by men and women varied considerably. Men usually had better access to information about the external context and external assistance while women relied more on personal contacts for information.
- Marginalised groups were generally less well served with information, as were more remote communities.



## Information needs

Immediately following the earthquakes, there was widespread demand for information about temporary settlement and the availability of relief materials. This need was consistently expressed in all the FGDs and KIs. In the worst-affected areas, people said they needed information about help that was coming in terms of rescue operations, and the cleaning up of debris from wrecked houses and properties. Some also stressed the need for information about the number of casualties and deaths caused by the earthquakes, and particularly the whereabouts and safety of their relatives and friends. There was also widespread demand for information about the recurrence of aftershocks and safety measures to deal with them.

Beyond these general themes, information needs varied by group:

**Women** talked about their overwhelming need for information that would help them feel safe. The frequent aftershocks were taking a toll, making them feel more vulnerable and scared. They wanted information to counter or confirm the rumours that were circulating<sup>39</sup>, and support to deal with trauma. In two locations, they wanted to know how they could contact police officers to ask for help: the police and army were often the first to reach more remote locations for search and rescue. Another key concern women had was about health issues: how to deal with the injured, primary healthcare, and the availability of medicines. See Box 5. Many respondents were worried about the state of health of their children and older people, especially if they were living under temporary shelter, usually tents. And they were worried about the conditions for pregnant women who were about to give birth, or who had recently given birth, and how they would be cared for.

### Box 5: Women's information needs to deal with injuries, in an inaccessible VDC, immediately after the earthquakes

In the women's FGD in Baruwa VDC, participants described how, immediately after the earthquake, they did not know what to do for their children and family members who were injured. Rescue operations were carried out in nearby VDCs that were accessible by road, but the inaccessibility of Baruwa VDC delayed rescue efforts.

**'Many outsiders didn't know that our village existed. People came to help us only after a month after the earthquake, when a helicopter came in to rescue the seriously injured people. The nearby health post is more than three hours' walk from our village of Yangri. We really had a hard time as we didn't know how to take care of our injured family members. We were especially worried about our children.'**

Participant, women's FGD, Baruwa VDC

**Men** initially also wanted information about how and where to take the injured, how to rescue people and animals trapped in buildings, and what to do about bodies and dead animals<sup>40</sup>. Their principal concern, however, was information about settlement: initially temporary shelter so that they could keep their families safe, and then whether the land was still safe for housing and re-building. Some were concerned about the lack of available drinking water and the condition of water pipes, which had been damaged. And some were concerned about how to address the mental stress caused by the earthquakes and aftershocks.

**Young people's** information needs were similar to those of men and women. When the frequent aftershocks triggered landslides, they wanted to know if their villages were safe for future settlements, and when power supplies would resume. They were worried about the accessibility of their villages to rescuers due to the damage to road infrastructure, and wanted to know if they would be reached. Some young people also said that they wanted to know when their schools and colleges would re-open.

<sup>39</sup> A key informant from a media support organisation described rumours taking on a 'mythical quality', especially in the early days and weeks after the earthquakes when people were particularly fearful.

<sup>40</sup> There were more dead animals than people as many farm animals were crushed in cowsheds.

**Marginalised groups** wanted information about how to stay safe and secure and not to feel scared. More generally this group wanted information about shelter: where to stay and what type of shelter to rebuild. Their information needs were similar to other groups, but their demand for information, and their expectations of having their needs met, did appear to be lower than other groups. See Section 5.4 below.

### The extent to which these information needs were met, and how

Within the first few days of the earthquake, although the need for information was greatest, respondents said that what they received from external sources was minimal. Information mostly came from friends or from family members through phone calls (although it was not possible to make phone calls in the first few hours following the earthquake as telephone networks were down). This flow of information and news by phone seems to have been particularly important, especially from people in Kathmandu who were usually better informed than their rural relatives, for example, about the likelihood of another major earthquake, and how to deal with aftershocks. Women in Sangachok told us how they were reassured by their relatives that things would be alright:

**'Family members and neighbours were with us and we stayed together and told each other that we would be fine and things would be alright.'** Participant, women's FGD, Sangachok

Gradually, information did start to reach affected communities in the days and weeks after the earthquakes, but this depended greatly on the accessibility of the community. Some locations, such as Yangri Wardin Baruwa VDC, received very little information from external sources. On the other hand, the slightly more accessible VDC of Fulpinkot started to receive information within a couple of days of the first earthquake.

#### Box 6: Contrasting Experiences in Fulpinkot VDC (accessible) and Baruwa VDC (less accessible)

**'For one or two days (after the earthquake) there wasn't any information at all because everything was damaged following the earthquake. After that, I heard about human casualties, damage, relief distributions from national and international organisations.'** Shopkeeper, Fulpinkot VDC (as well as his neighbours and friends, the information sources appeared to be radio and newspapers)

**'We had radios, even TVs, but most of them were destroyed under the wreckage. We didn't have electricity, so it was difficult. Only a few radios are left. We don't have much time to listen to it either.'** Driver, Baruwa VDC (Yangri village in Baruwa has no mobile phone network coverage)

People mostly said that they were not adequately informed about what to do in response to aftershocks. What information they did get about safety, for example, staying in open places or not walking near damaged or fallen buildings, partly came from the radio, but also from local community members such as teachers, Ward Coordinators and better-informed villagers. And people also worked it out for themselves. A man from the indigenous Majhi community in Sangachok explained that they learned to stay in open places when they saw their friends injured by staying in buildings after the earthquakes.

The lack of reliable information helped to create an environment rich with rumours and confusion. Some people had been made to believe that there would not be another big earthquake, so when there was a second big quake in May there was a loss of confidence in the information circulating, much of it from friends, neighbours and relatives. Women in particular told us that their primary concern was information that would help them feel safe, but they did not feel their needs were met.

Information, including rumours, which often seemed to circulate faster than more accurate information, came from a range of sources that differed according to group. **Men** were most likely to approach the local government representatives, such as the VDC Secretary and Ward Coordinator, and also to get information from discussions in teashops. **Women** were more likely to get information from their personal contacts, for example, from their husband, other relatives and friends. Radio and TV were cited as sources of information where they were available and still functioning, but were generally listened to more by men than women<sup>41</sup>. Children also became a source of information because they had been instructed on earthquake safety at school. This knowledge was subsequently shared with their parents.

Health-related information appears to have been quite widely received, conveyed through health workers to local women, pictorial messages on hoarding boards and some targeted training provided by aid organisations. As noted earlier, some of the information pre-dated the earthquakes, including messaging about boiling water before drinking, not defecating in open areas, and hand washing. Information reaching more remote locations, such as Baruwa, was sometimes incomplete or viewed as unhelpful. **Men** in Yangri village said they received information about water purifiers but they were not taught how to use them. In Fulpinkot, some men said they used the water purifying tablets while they were free, but others did not use them at all. **Women** in Boudha camp had received training from an international NGO about how to take care of their children in the post-disaster conditions that they had found useful, and pregnant women in Fulpinkot VDC had also received training from the female health worker. However, women in other locations did not receive any health-related training.

In some places people got information about the availability of relief materials and the timing of imminent distributions, although information about what they would receive seemed less prevalent. See Section 3.5 below.

Feedback from men and women in Fulpinkot, which was generally better served with information, revealed some interesting gender-related differences in terms of the type of information they heard. See Box 7.

### Box 7: Information that women and men in Fulpinkot said they heard after the earthquake

Women said they heard information about the trafficking of children and girls, and they were advised to keep their children away from strangers. (This appears to have come through street dramas provided by an international NGO on human trafficking.) They heard something about cash grants, but did not feel that the information was complete.

The information that men heard was more to do with support from government, for example cash support for winter clothes (more recent) and that government is coming up with a new building code. They also said they had made themselves ready for the next disaster with an emergency 'grab bag' in response to advice they heard over the radio.

<sup>41</sup> This supports the findings of a 2014 media survey by Internews and Interdisciplinary Analysts.

This was indicative of a more general pattern of information received by men and women, especially in more accessible areas where information from external sources was more likely to have reached them.

**Men** appeared to be more oriented to information about what was happening externally: immediately after the earthquakes they said they heard information about casualties and the death toll in other places, and subsequently about government grants, for example, the Rs 10,000 that would supposedly be distributed by the government to each victim's family<sup>42</sup>. In Baruwa, men said that they heard that the government would take care of them for six months, but were concerned about how they would be able to access the promised grant of Rs 10,000. Some men mentioned that they received information about how many NGOs, national and international, were involved in rescue and relief operations. **Women**, such as the ones interviewed at Boudha Camp, said they received information about women's protection, for example, how to keep their daughters safe, and to not to let them walk alone in camps. In every location visited, **women and some young people** had heard about human trafficking, especially of girls, from the radio, from organisations, and from friends and family members. As noted above, many were aware of this threat before the earthquakes as information and messaging about trafficking pre-dates the earthquakes by many years.

**Young people** received somewhat similar messages, for example, in terms of safety and being advised not to go near large, cracked buildings, and some were told to keep small children with their parents at all times. But their information sources varied. In Baruwa, which was much less accessible and poorly served with information from external sources, young people said they got information about how to stay safe from within the community, from teachers and social workers. But in more accessible locations, such as Khokana, they got information about safety from radio and aid agencies. Where agencies had visited, for example, in Sangachok, young people heard about trafficking of women and children (in this case from Save the Children) and were advised to be cautious. Some young people said they were advised, for example, by their youth leader or by neighbours, to maintain good social relations and to help each other.

Information received by people from **marginalised groups** was quite similar to the others. They received general messages about safety and relief, which usually came from better-informed people in the community, for example, from teachers. In Fulpinkot, the Ward Coordinator appears to have played an important role, particularly in providing information about forthcoming relief distributions. Police officers in Fulpinkot were also cited as sources of information. But in Bhimtar, the Ward Coordinator did not live with the Majhi community and rarely visited, which meant they were generally less well-informed. Overall, there was a sense that marginalised groups had less access to, and were less well-served by, information, for example, on sanitation and human trafficking, and that this is a long-term issue. Surprisingly, **young people** in Bhimtar said they were alerted to human trafficking for the first time after the earthquakes, despite long-running information campaigns in Nepal about the issue.

### Box 8: Feedback from marginalised community groups

'A few organisations and individual donors provided relief materials, but we didn't get much information on aftershocks and what to do when we were scared.'

Male participant, Majhi community FGD, Bhimtar, Sangachok VDC

'Later, slowly, through the Ward Coordinator and people from our neighbouring village, we received information about relief materials and other support that were reaching our district. Some organisations did come and ask about our needs.'

Participant, Majhi community FGD, Bhimtar, Sangachok VDC

In the PRA exercises, participants were asked about the main types of information they needed and the main types of information received immediately after the earthquakes. The analysis of their feedback is presented in Box 9, which should be read alongside analysis of the more detailed discussions in FGDs presented in Annex 1.

<sup>42</sup> On 16 May 2015, a cabinet meeting took the decision to provide Rs. 10,000 to every family whose house had been destroyed by the earthquakes. The money was intended to build temporary shelters before the monsoon season, but many eligible families did not receive the grant for many months, especially those living in more remote areas. However, by the time of the fieldwork, in November/December 2015, most eligible families did appear to have received the grant.

## Box 9: Information needed compared to that received immediately after the earthquakes, from PRA exercises (which was further elaborated in the focus group discussions)

### The main information received after the earthquakes

- Preparedness messages relating to aftershocks: risk of damaged buildings; 'run into open spaces'; grab bags\*
- WASH messages relating to water and sanitation eg, access to clean water \*
- News of other areas, casualties, and damage
- Protection messages about trafficking, protecting women and children
- Access to relief, timings of distributions, entitlement and meetings with providers (mentioned in 9 out of 17 FGDs)\*
- Government plans, access to grants and information on distributions

\* Highlighted as particularly matching people's information needs

### The main information needs that had been partially met (information needs were greater than information received)

- Scientific facts about the earthquake, dispelling rumours
- Health-related: access to medicines, treatment of injuries, health training and rescue services
- Psycho-social, how to relieve fear, access to counselling (partially met in some locations, not in others)

### The main unmet information needs (a need was stated and apparently no information was received)

- Information about shelter, including access to temporary shelter or materials, and how to build earthquake-resistant housing
- How to get access to food and food distributions (as distinct from other forms of relief)<sup>43</sup>

## 3.3 Information needs seven months after the earthquakes, the extent to which those needs have been met, and how

### Box 10: Summary of key findings

- The main information need was about government assistance, especially for permanent shelter solutions and about government loans. There was much less demand for information from humanitarian agencies.
- **Men** wanted information about permanent settlement and land. **Women** wanted information about support to ensure the health and welfare of their families through the winter. **All groups** wanted information about when public buildings would be rebuilt, especially schools.
- Much of the information received related to government assistance, but there was a great deal of rumour and confusion about the support available and people's entitlement.
- Rumours about the possibility of future large earthquakes were still circulating, and were particularly frightening for the less well-educated and for those unable to access original sources, in terms of what this meant.
- Health messaging continued.
- The **major unmet information need** was still about shelter, especially finding permanent shelter solutions.

<sup>43</sup> Although this was mentioned in the PRA exercise, it was not raised in the general discussion in the FGDs, apart from in Baruwa, where they only received food relief one to two months after the earthquakes. As the village is a three-hour walk from Bhotang, they were not as well served as more accessible VDCs, such as Bhotang.



## Information needs

Seven months after the earthquakes some people in Sindhupalchowk and Kathmandu were still living in makeshift tents or temporary houses made from zinc sheets. As the winter cold intensified during the period of fieldwork for this study (at the end of November and early December) people expressed deep concern about the prospects for permanent housing, saying that some people were already dying from the cold<sup>44</sup>.

People interviewed said their main information need was to know what the government was going to do to help provide them with permanent shelter. They also wanted to know if their land was safe to re-build after the earthquake, and about government loans that they had heard about which were supposed to be available but had not materialised<sup>45</sup>.

**'We have crossed the temporary stage now. What we need now is a sustainable solution to our problem. One of the most important things we need is housing. These tents are not sustainable.'**

School teacher, men's FGD, Sangachok.

People also wanted information about the fuel crisis. They were worried about the unavailability of cooking gas and fuel, which was hindering their day-to-day activities. In Fulpinkot, women described how those working as daily labourers had had their wages reduced and how transportation had become an issue due to the lack of fuel.

**'I have to build my house but since my husband is out of work we do not know when that is going to happen. Also, due to the fuel crisis there is a lack of fertilizers in the market which is hampering production this year.'**

Participant, women's FGD, Fulpinkot VDC

A **gender-differentiated pattern** of information needs similar to those immediately after the earthquakes was still evident seven months later. **Men** wanted information about their settlement: whether the land was safe and about long-term solutions to provide safe housing. **Women** were more concerned about the health and welfare of their family members, especially in the cold weather, and wanted information about resources to support them. For all groups, the focus was on the government, and how it would support them. There was much less demand for information from, or about, humanitarian agencies.

**Men** in all locations visited wanted to know about their government entitlements, particularly to re-build their houses and also about winter cash grants. How much would they get, and when? Some were keen to know about the '**naksa**' (the residential home design/drawing) to build earthquake-resistant houses as prescribed by the government. Above all they wanted clear and reliable information to counter or confirm the rumours circulating about government grants. Some wanted to know how to build houses from bamboo, while others (for example, in Fulpinkot) wanted to know where to get zinc sheets in order to build '**tahara**' (temporary houses). Men in Sangachok wanted information on clearing the debris. Some also wanted to know about the permanent reconstruction of public buildings, such as schools.

There was growing concern about livelihoods. While this is a longer-term issue in Nepal, there was a sense that agriculture had been negatively affected by the earthquakes through landslides and the threat of further landslides. **Men** expressed their need for employment opportunities saying they could not survive on relief materials and donations alone. They wanted to know if skills development training would be provided. **Young people** asked for similar information, on whether skills training would be available to them, for example, in plumbing, tailoring, training to work in beauty parlours, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Follow-up by the Nepal government and the World Health Organisation indicated that people may have died from complications associated with the cold, but not directly from the cold weather.

<sup>45</sup> Immediately after the April 25 earthquake, the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), the Central Bank of Nepal, announced a concessional loan scheme for earthquake victims for the reconstruction of their houses. The soft loan was to be made available by commercial banks, development banks and finance companies at an interest rate of 2%. Earthquake victims in the Kathmandu Valley would get a maximum loan of Rs. 2.5 million, and those outside the valley would be entitled to a maximum of Rs. 1.5 million. Although this scheme had been announced many months ago, at the time of the fieldwork for this study no one had been able to secure a loan.

**'We have no work here in this village. We need to find employment either in Kathmandu or abroad. To go abroad, we need to spend money. Jobs in Nepal would be good.'**

Participant, youth FGD, Sangachok

**Women** wanted to know if the government was going to do anything about helping earthquake victims get through the cold weather. Women from the Majhi indigenous group in Bhimtar village, Sangachok, said that they were still in need of healthcare following the earthquake, and especially at the time of the fieldwork for this study, as family members, including themselves, were falling sick because of the cold. They were staying in makeshift shelters. They said that many children were getting colds and some had contracted pneumonia, but the nearest health post was three hours' walk from the village. Women in Fulpinkot VDC wanted to know more about how to take care of their family members who were disabled after the earthquake. Women also had concerns about when schools were going to be reconstructed.

**'There is a temporary cottage built after the school collapsed but it's not built strongly, so I get a little scared to send my children to school. I wonder when government will build the school.'**

Participant, women's FGD, Fulpinkot

Some **women**, for example, in Sangachok VDC, wanted information about the exploitation of children in the cities. Many families were compelled to send their children to work as domestic workers or labourers in the cities because of their economic circumstances, having lost everything in the earthquakes. They wanted to know if there were government mechanisms to protect the children from becoming victims of exploitation and abuse. They also wanted information on whether agencies or government had any plans for the children who lost their parents in the earthquakes, and for their protection. Concerns about settlement were expressed by women's groups as well as men. Box 11 shows how these needs were expressed in two different locations – a rural one and in a camp.

### Box 11: How women expressed their information needs about shelter

In Boudha camp, Kathmandu, the women explained how they had migrated to Kathmandu about three months after the first earthquake. Their information needs had changed as they were unfamiliar with the new place where they were staying. They said that although they felt physically safe in Kathmandu, their hearts belonged to their village. They were eager to hear about government plans for their settlement back in the village.

In Baruwa VDC, women described their need for information about shelter because most of their houses were destroyed by landslides and they had been staying in temporary shelters on other people's land. They wanted to know when aid agencies, which had promised to build permanent houses, would come and do so. They said they did not have any hope in the government as they had never been visited by government authorities since the first earthquake in April.

The information needs of **young people** are more or less similar to the information needs of men and women described above. They wanted clarification about government grants:

**'Government needs to provide Rs 10,000 or 20,000 as soon as possible. Or it needs to tell the people when it is going to do so. That helps in terms of planning or finding an alternative.'**

Participant, youth FGD, Bhimtar, Sangachok

In some locations, young people wanted to know when debris would be cleared, when houses would be rebuilt, and guidelines from government on earthquake-resistant designs announced.

More frequently they asked about education: when schools and colleges would be re-built. This was a particular concern for young people in less accessible locations. In Fulpinkot, they made the point that the government should make education free for the children of earthquake victims. They also discussed how they wanted to eradicate superstition from their community, so that their elders would stop believing in astrologers to provide predictions about future earthquakes and instead look to other more reliable sources of information.

Seven months after the earthquakes there was still a need for information about aftershocks and safety. **Men** in Baruwa said they still had not been able to work their land because of aftershocks. They wanted to know whether there would be another earthquake. **Women** in Khokana also said they wanted to know if there would be another large earthquake. And there still appeared to be an **unmet need for information** (psycho-social counseling and supportive messages) to reduce trauma, expressed, for example, by women in Boudha camp.

### **The extent to which those information needs were being met, and how**

Much of the information being disseminated and received at the time of this study's fieldwork was about government regulations for building earthquake-resistant housing and government grants. This came from local government officials, such as the Ward Coordinator and VDC Secretary. There was talk about the availability of loans from government at low interest rates, and information about a Rs 10,000 winter allowance for each family was circulating widely. But there was also a great deal of confusion about these and other government programmes of support: different ministers at the national level had been heard saying different things, which were then broadcast in the media. But local government officials had no clear instructions or information about government assistance to pass on to local people. Men were usually more involved in these discussions about government entitlements and grant money than women.

Information about the economic trade blockade was also widespread, as was information about the impact of the fuel crisis on markets, including the black market. This information, which was more 'news', came from radio, TV and newspapers, as well as being discussed among family members and friends, locally and from Kathmandu. **Young people** got this kind of news from social media, such as Facebook.

Health messages (eg, boiling water before drinking as water sources may have been contaminated; washing hands before and after each meal) from various organisations and from the radio were also quite widely received.

Rumours were still widely circulating about future earthquakes and landslides, and about government grant money. **Men** in Khokana described how these rumours spread through word of mouth faster than other information, but they assumed the information about earthquakes to be rumours as they knew they cannot be predicted. Other groups who were less well educated and and/or less well-informed were less able to discern what information could be trusted and what could not. **Women** in Baruwa said they heard rumours that there would be another big earthquake of 9 or 10 on the Richter scale sometime soon, and were very scared because they did not know whether it was true or not; they were still suffering trauma from the earlier earthquakes. Box 12 explores the issue of information circulation, and rumours about earthquakes in more depth.

## **Box 12: Information and rumours about future earthquakes**

After the two earthquakes in April and May 2015, rumours about the next earthquake being bigger than those already experienced caused fear and panic, prompting many people to sleep outside in open spaces. The Nepal police arrested dozens of people (including self-proclaimed astrologers) for spreading false rumours of an impending earthquake through social media and text messages.

The aftershocks have since waned and people are returning to their normal lives. However, a study by Oxford University, reported by the BBC, both of which are respected and trusted sources, triggered serious concerns among the Nepalese people about the next earthquake. This research highlighted an unbroken part of the fault line where pressure is building over time, and which could trigger an earthquake with a much greater impact on Kathmandu and the west of Nepal than the two 2015 earthquakes – although clearly the timing cannot be predicted.

The Oxford study and the BBC report have been widely translated and shared through online media outlets and social media, and have been broadcast on radio and television. Newspapers such as **The Himalayan Times, My Republica, The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur** and some online media have reproduced the articles in full<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> See <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/wha-concerned-about-earthquake-rumours/>  
<http://www.onlinekhabar.com/2016/01/374022/>  
<http://myrepublica.com/society/story/34848/strain-on-nepal-faultline-risks-another-earthquake-in-kathmandu-study-finds.html>

## Box 12: continued

In FGDs in each location people said they had heard that there would be bigger earthquakes in Nepal in the future, mostly from their friends and family members. Women in Fulpinkot said that this information made them frightened to stay inside the house and they could not sleep for many nights. Even in the less accessible areas like Baruwa, women said they were scared to go to the nearby forest to cut grass for fear they would die in landslides triggered by another big earthquake.

This is an example of how the gist of a scientific article can be spread by word-of-mouth, often becoming distorted in the process and causing panic and fear among those with less access to the original information and/or with inadequate education to understand it.

However, Internews OpenMic has been responsive to rumours triggered by publication of these kinds of studies in its regular bulletins.

After publication of the Oxford study in **Nature GeoScience**, Internews OpenMic attempted to synthesise some basic facts, and to reiterate messages about staying safe after an earthquake in response to the rumours triggered by an earlier study.<sup>47</sup> The challenge in a country like Nepal is to achieve widespread dissemination of information, quickly and effectively quelling rumours that spread rapidly, causing fear and alarm.

One of the **marginalised communities** visited, the dalit community in Fulpinkot, generally seemed to be as well-informed as other groups in the population. They had information (albeit confused and confusing) about government grants, relief distribution, and about health and sanitation. They talked about radio programmes that broadcast messages about how to keep warm in winter, advising people to drink warm water, especially children and the elderly, and that they should add black pepper to water and boil it for five minutes before drinking in order to keep the body warm. And they got information from their Brahmin neighbours. The indigenous Majhi community was less well informed as it was more remote, detached from other communities and not served well by its local government representative.

Beyond these broad patterns, there were location-specific examples of the type of information different groups had received:

- All FGDs in Sangachok – men, women, youth and the Majhi community – said they had received information about the trafficking of girls and women.
- In Khokana, men reported that zinc sheets were provided to them by World Vision in order to build temporary houses, and that they had heard that reconstruction of their houses would be done in the same exterior style as before in order to preserve their heritage.
- In Baruwa, FGD participants said they had heard that aid for winter protection would be provided by Save the Children, Tuki Association Sunkoshi and Care Nepal.
- Women in Sangachok said they had heard from friends that earthquake victims were being offered visa support, for example, visas to leave the country would be given free or at a reduced rate. They had also heard from the radio that no-one was to be allowed to rebuild their house until they had received the earthquake-proof designs from government. And only people with land certificates would get support from government, which caused some consternation.
- Youth in Bhimtar, Sangachok, said they had heard how government would provide allowances for children below the age of five years (although these proved to be inaccurate rumours). They also heard from their friends on Facebook that earthquake victims would get a free visa for Malaysia with their earthquake 'victim card'.
- In Boudha camp at least one youth organisation organised sessions on employment opportunities for young people.
- Women in Boudha camp said they had received information about how to contact the police or government officials if the need arose.
- Women in Khokana said they had heard 'counselling' messages over the radio, about staying calm and not being afraid.

<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.quakehelpdesk.org/openmic/issue27/English.pdf> and <http://www.quakehelpdesk.org/openmic/issue6/English.pdf>

A summary of the feedback from the PRA exercises is presented in Box 13 (to be read alongside analysis of the general feedback from focus group discussions, presented above).

### Box 13: Information needed compared to information received seven months after the earthquakes, from PRA exercises

#### The main information received

- Government relief; access to grants; support plans and entitlements\*<sup>48</sup> (mentioned by large numbers of people)
- Relief in general, including access to NGO support; aid for winterisation (eg, clothes, blankets); training; income generation; agricultural support; and seeds and fertilisers\*
- Protection and trafficking risks (mentioned by large numbers of people)
- WASH, eg, access to clean water and sanitation messages

\* highlighted as particularly matching information needs

#### The main information needs that had been partially met (information needs were greater than information received)

- Health-related, eg, access to and reconstruction of health facilities; reproductive health; nutrition information
- Preparedness for future earthquakes

#### The main unmet information needs

- Shelter: information about how to rebuild; reconstruction assistance; land rights; where to stay
- Education, eg, information about when schools would re-open

### 3.4 Local people's experience of agency consultations about their needs

According to the local people interviewed, needs assessments were lacking in almost every VDC visited during the fieldwork. People said they were not consulted by agencies and that their priority needs had not been met. This was particularly stark in one VDC where young people told us in an FGD:

**'Our houses still have remained as it is. It has been completely destroyed but debris has not been cleared yet<sup>49</sup>. Agency X came to this village and graveled the road and put solar power on the roads. However, what we wanted was to get help from them in clearing the debris. There are still so many things we can use from our damaged house, like utensils, stones or bricks, wood, or grains could be used, too. We asked Agency X to help us but they instead helped us with the easy stuff, something either a small organisation or we ourselves could have done.'**

We were also told that people had received five buckets from different aid agencies when their actual need was blankets. Organisations fitted solar panels in their houses, but what they wanted was the debris to be cleared from their land so they could build temporary shelters.

This dissatisfaction that priority needs were not being met resonates with the findings of the CFP CPS results, where 68% of people surveyed said their priority needs were still not being addressed by early-October 2015. Their unmet needs were shelter (short-term and then later longer term), housing and financial support. Lack of support for livelihoods had also been raised since the end of August in Rounds 2 and 3.

<sup>48</sup> Although people received information on government assistance, it is worth noting that there were numerous rumours and a general lack of clarity about government support and people's entitlements.

<sup>49</sup> When talking of clearing 'debris', local people are usually referring to large chunks of construction debris that they are unable to clear themselves and/or debris that it would be unsafe for them to clear themselves.



### 3.5 Local people's general impressions of relief distributions

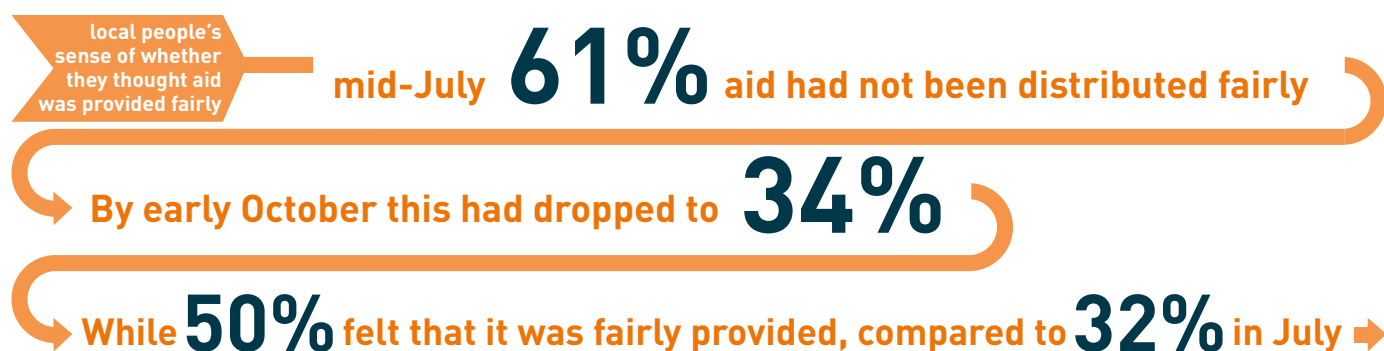
#### Overall sense of resentment that other areas were better served

In a number of FGDs in different locations, participants said they had heard about relief, though often about programmes serving other locations. This generated a sense of resentment and of being left out. In FGDs with **women and young people** in Boudha camp, participants said they had heard about relief distributions in other camps. Generally, participants from more accessible areas said they had received news that there had been more generous distribution of relief materials in less-accessible areas, although this was not apparent from our fieldwork in less accessible areas. A flavour of this resentment comes from Sangachok:

'Our village gets really less attention or relief materials compared to what others are getting. INGOs and UN agencies are focusing on VDCs other than ours. As roads are nearby, they might think we are at the central level and we do not need the help. That is not the case. Though we are comparatively accessible, we also do have the same problems as others do.' Participant, men's FGD, Sangachok

Meanwhile in the most remote VDC we visited, Baruwa, people talked about how national and international organisations were more focused on easily accessible locations and how more remote areas like theirs were excluded, both in terms of information and the distribution of relief. There had been cases of looting of relief materials in several areas of Sindhupalchowk because people felt that they were not treated fairly.

The CFP CPS results show quite a substantial improvement over several months (from mid-July and early October, between Rounds 1 and 3) in local people's sense of whether they thought aid was provided fairly: in mid-July, 61% said that aid had not been distributed fairly. By early October this had dropped to 34%, while 50% felt that it was fairly provided, compared to 32% in July<sup>50</sup>.



#### Information about a forthcoming relief distribution at community level, and beneficiary selection

Information about imminent relief distributions for particular communities usually reached people through their community leaders: the VDC Secretary and/or Ward Coordinator in rural areas, or the camp leader in Boudha camp in Kathmandu. Many agencies appear to have used this route to inform local people in preparation for a relief distribution for their community. Generally **men** appeared to be better informed than women about relief distributions, resonating with the CFP's findings in their CPS results.

'Some NGOs provide information to the VDC in advance, about a week-long notice. Then the VDC officials inform the ward coordinator and other institutions like the political parties. And then we come to know about it. As we normally go to the tea-shop in the mornings, then we come to know about these things quickly.' Participant, men's FGD, Sangachok

**Young people** in both Khokana and Boudha camp said there was little transparency in how distributions were carried out. They had received information about how grant money and relief materials provided by government and by international agencies had been misused and not distributed equally among victims. Local leaders were said to be responsible for this. Unfair distribution of relief was widely reported in all locations: that people with connections got more, and that some got nothing while others got double. In Sangachok, **women** questioned aid organisations' methods of selecting beneficiaries for relief, and they queried why certain locations with similar levels of destruction were neglected. They said that they resented aid organisations when they saw vehicles with relief materials passing by their villages but not providing them with anything.

<sup>50</sup> As reported in the Inter-agency Common Feedback Report for October 2015.

In Boudha camp, some of the challenges of over-reliance on the camp leader and committee for providing information on relief distributions to their community became evident. See Box 14.

### Box 14: Role of the camp leader in Boudha camp

In Boudha camp people said they got most of their information about relief distributions from the camp leader. The reason was clear as organisations first contacted the camp leader and agreed what people in the camp needed and what would be provided. The camp leader then informed the camp residents about forthcoming relief distributions or any activities/training to be provided by those organisations. In an effort to try and ensure that voices (and grievances) of the camp dwellers were heard, a relief committee was formed. But this tended to be dominated by a more powerful member of the camp, with the result that the committee did not appear to be facilitating communication between agencies and the camp dwellers.

**'We have problems but committee members do not allow us to speak.'** Female resident, Boudha camp

**'There is a management committee here, so instead of telling people we have to first convince the chairman of the committee, and if they are convinced, the message goes to people through them. There is a stronghold of the committee, so it is necessary to go through the committee. Talking directly to people is not effective.'** Health worker, Boudha camp

Camp dwellers had to be on good terms with the camp leader to get their share of what was distributed: some **women** interviewed clearly lost out with this arrangement. Although being in the city meant that people in Boudha camp were quite mobile and got information of different kinds from many different sources, including radio and TV in the houses of friends and acquaintances, when it came to information about relief for the camp, the camp leader and relief committees became de facto gatekeepers and filters for information.

Only rarely had people heard about relief distributions on the radio, although agencies in Sindhupalchowk did use this medium to let people know about imminent distributions, and where and when they would take place.

**'I normally listen to Sindhu FM. There I heard that the organisations and government are distributing relief materials to the earthquake-affected people in different districts.'** Elderly woman farmer, KII, Fulpinkot

### Box 15: An example of how one agency communicated with local communities

According to Ward Coordinators in Fulpinkot, World Vision International (WVI) talked to them and other community leaders first about relief programmes, then these community leaders talked to villagers and fed back the information to WVI. This process was confirmed by one of WVI's Accountability Officers based in Sindhupalchowk, who explained how they communicate with the Ward Citizens Forum (which comprises the Ward Coordinators) to tell them about an imminent relief distribution and about beneficiary selection processes. Leaflets about the imminent relief distribution were also made available, although WVI staff questioned their usefulness as so many people are illiterate. A Help Desk, staffed by WVI staff, was set up during the distribution which could pro-actively ask certain groups like older people, dalits and children if they had the information they needed about the relief distribution. Even with these procedures in place, they described some of the challenges of communicating about relief distributions, particularly ensuring older people had understood. They also described how people frequently did not know which agency was doing what. For example, when they saw a 'W' in the agency's name, they sometimes assumed it was WVI when it was actually WFP (World Food Programme).

## Information about how to use relief resources

While organisations distributed various types of relief materials, the researchers were told on a number of occasions that people were not taught how to use them. For example, water purifiers were distributed in Yangri village, in Baruwa, but without any instruction. In Sangachok, VDC **men** told us they had been given seeds of vegetables they were not familiar with, so did not know how to plant and cultivate them. This seemed to be more of an issue in more remote areas which had little ongoing contact with agencies. In more accessible areas, health workers taught people how to use water purifiers. These findings resonate with research carried out by BBC Media Action in 2012, which concluded that people need to have specific information to take action, and that one of the biggest barriers was not knowing how to respond or what to do.

During the fieldwork, local people also questioned the usefulness of being provided with resources and materials that they could not continue to use when the relief stopped. Some said they had been drinking water for generations from a particular source, but suddenly they were asked by people from outside to use purifiers. First, they wanted to check whether the local water they were drinking was potable or not and, if not, they wanted more locally appropriate and affordable solutions. Similarly, **women and girls** found the sanitary pads distributed to be useful, but when the supplies finished there were no shops selling pads, which would have been too expensive for most anyway.

With a few exceptions, people generally did not know which organisation was associated with which relief distribution. **Men** were usually better informed about this than women.

### 3.6 Common, preferred, accurate and trusted channels of information, by population group

As explained above, FGD participants were asked to engage in a simple PRA exercise to record the most common, preferred, accurate and trusted ways of receiving information. (The answers to 'accurate' and 'trusted' were almost always the same, so the word 'trusted' is mostly used in this section). This was further explored through discussion and in one-to-one interviews in which some important nuances emerged.

Overall analysis of the PRA findings shows that the most common channels of information were mobile phones, face-to-face communication and radio. See Table 4. Mobile phones were used to contact relatives, access the Internet and radio, and to access social media. Face-to-face was said to be preferred over radio and more trusted, although radio was credited with being accurate<sup>51</sup>. For those who had access to it (especially younger people), Facebook was more trusted when looking at information in general.

**Table 4: PRA results: a summary of the most common, preferred, accurate and trusted channels of information**

How information was valued	Channel of information
Most common source of information	Mobile phone, then face-to-face and radio
Preferred source of information	Face-to-face
Most accurate source of information	Face-to-face and radio
Most trusted source of information	Face-to-face



In further exploring 'preferred' and 'trusted' sources of information in FGDs, and in individual interviews, an **interesting distinction** emerges: between general information about the disaster (eg, about areas and people affected) and about assistance that would be available, especially from government; and information that was much more personally relevant (eg, about their particular entitlement to assistance and how to access it, and relevant to their specific circumstances in terms of rebuilding and safety) as people sought to rebuild their lives and communities, and especially their homes.

<sup>51</sup> This contrasts with the findings of BBC Media Action's survey in their partners' operational areas conducted in September 2015, in which 91% said that radio was the most trusted source of information – but in that survey 'face-to face' was not included as a category.

In terms of the first category of general information, media, such as TV and radio, emerged as important and trusted sources of information. Although TV was not widely available, especially in most of the rural locations visited, it was still considered to be accurate because of the visuals that accompanied what was being said. In the words of one **woman** interviewed: 'We believe what we see.' Other women talked about the value of seeing areas they had never been to, and seeing the faces of ministers and of the Prime Minister that would otherwise be unknown to them. Immediately following the earthquakes, many people described being desperate for news about how other parts of the country had been affected. Nepal Television and Kantipur appeared to be the most trusted of the television channels. Radio is also quite widely trusted, particularly Radio Nepal. Among the older generation and rural people there is greater trust in media associated with government, and less trust in other sources, for example, community-based FM radio and international organisations.

**Women** in Khokana VDC said they trusted radio most as it is the source of external information that they have used all their lives. However, this view was countered by women in Sangachok VDC who told us how messages they had received on the radio in the past 'To hide under the table if there was an earthquake', had encouraged many children who were playing outside to run in and hide under tables, and many had died as a result. This had undermined their confidence in the radio as an accurate source of information (although since the earthquake agencies have attempted to counter this example of 'poor messaging' from the past).

For the second category of information – more personally relevant information – personal and face-to-face communication emerged as the overall preferred channels of information, not least because this was more likely to be a conversational dialogue and came from known sources, whereas radio and TV (mass communication programming) disseminate more general information that might say what people were entitled to, but not when or how to get it<sup>52</sup>.

'Only 25% of the people here watch television. And they like to watch films. They do not really listen to news, I think. And when they hear news, they try to cross-check with me if the VDC is providing the services as told by the radio and TV.' Ward Coordinator, Sangachok VDC (where more households seemed to have TV than in other rural locations visited)

There was also a sense that one could 'miss' important information on radio and TV when doing other things. The timing of radio programmes is therefore important. **Women** in particular said that information should be broadcast either early in the morning around 6am or after 8pm in the evening if they were to hear it.

### Box 16: Feedback on the relative importance of radio compared with face-to-face communication

'We need to make the VDC active, as radio and TV are not that accessible. Radio may give information when I am in my field or when I am away for my work. However, the VDC is there all the time; people affiliated with the VDC in one way or another are there all the time. So they give me information even when I am away for a day or two.'

'Not all radio [stations] are trustworthy. However, if it comes from the centre, then we can believe it. We believe Radio Nepal / Nepal Television.'

'At the local level, the VDC is the most important source for information and it is trustworthy, too. Government channels do not misinform people. The radio says that we are getting Rs10,000 from the government for this winter. However, the VDC says that they have not got any paper from the district headquarters on this. And the district headquarters says it has not got any guidance from the central level. So, unless it is confirmed by the VDC, what the radio says does not matter.'

Participants, men's FGD, Sangachok

#### Interview with an older woman in Fulpinkot

An older female farmer in Fulpinkot said she listened to Radio Sindhu, the local FM station, in her home. But because she is illiterate she has a hard time understanding the information. Although she listens to the radio, mostly around 6am, and has an idea of the programmes that are broadcast, she said that she needed help from someone to understand the information and what it really means.

<sup>52</sup> As expressed in Fulpinkot VDC.

Most **women** interviewed during the fieldwork expressed their preference for face-to-face communication over other media. Direct communication helped to reduce confusion and clarify the information provided as they could ask questions directly. In addition, many women interviewed did not have access to radio. Their preferred sources were usually social workers and health workers working in their communities who were said to be patient in helping them understand. Women also relied on their neighbours.

**'For us the main thing is our neighbours. They are our nearest and our immediate companions during emergencies. We rely on them the most after our family. Especially after the earthquake, after losing TV and radio, we only heard information from people's mouths. Before we used to watch television and hear radio for news and other programmes, but the earthquake took away everything.'** Young woman, Fulpinkot

Similarly, in Sangachok, women said they particularly trusted their own family and neighbours for information:

**'During emergencies it's your neighbours, whether good or bad, whom you run to for help. It takes a long while for the state to reach us with help.'** Woman, Sangachok

Some **women** expressed reservations about Ward Coordinators. In one location, the women said the Ward Coordinator became angry and impatient if people did not understand quickly. In another location the Ward Coordinator was described as 'one person' who has to take care of his own personal matters in an emergency as well as everyone else. This was in Sangachok where the women in the FGD suggested there should be a specific group tasked with going around the village to provide information; just announcing it through radio and television was not enough.

Generally, trusted people in the community who had access to the outside world were their preferred source of information. In Boudha camp, the Buddhist monks became a reliable and trusted source of information to the Sherpa and Lama ethnic groups in the camp who were of the same religion. Interestingly, this was the only case of religious leaders being cited as a trusted source of information.

While many **men** interviewed relied on the radio for news, their preferred source for information that was immediately relevant to them was the VDC Secretary and/or Ward Coordinator through face-to-face contact. Information was then frequently discussed and shared more widely in the teashops. Government representatives (eg, the VDC Secretary and Ward Coordinator) were generally believed as they were expected to provide accurate information. As described in Box 16 above, while people might hear information about entitlement to government assistance on the radio and TV, it had to be verified by the Ward Coordinator or VDC secretary<sup>53</sup>, regarded as the more accurate source of information. Problems therefore arose when the Ward Coordinator or VDC Secretary were poorly informed, as indicated in one location visited where the Ward Coordinator did not live in the village. This was not common in the other locations visited.

**Young people** appeared to have access to the widest range of information sources. The Internet and social media (particularly Facebook) were frequently mentioned as their preferred channels. Facebook was popular because of the speed at which information was transmitted and picked up between friends, for example, to keep updated about the earthquake and possible future quakes. More generally on the Internet, they could cross-check information they had heard from other sources. Most young people accessed the Internet from their mobile phones using data packages provided by the mobile phone companies. Some listened to the radio on their phones, to music for entertainment and to get information. Although they faced issues of connectivity, such as poor network signal, and lack of electricity in rural areas, many young people interviewed were prepared to travel to nearby villages with better network coverage in order to access the Internet on their mobile phones.

The extent to which young people trusted the radio and TV varied. The youth in Sangachok, for example, expressed skepticism while young people in Boudha camp appeared more trusting of information provided by radio and TV, saying they did not think the presenters would lie, or that these sources would provide false information.

<sup>53</sup> In Fulpinkot, the Ward Coordinator explained how he, in turn, went to the VDC Secretary for information, for example to verify how the government is going to distribute its promised Rs 10,000 for households. Is it going to be distributed or deposited into bank accounts?



'The VDC belongs to all of us and it provides us exact information. It also publishes notice outside on its wall. Radio and TV might give you fake information but the VDC (Secretary) tells you the exact information.'  
Young person, Sangachok

A number of **young people** talked about the importance of getting information from local leaders, whether from the VDC, from teachers or from the local youth club (in the case of Boudha camp and Khokana): these were usually regarded as trusted sources. Local leaders were particularly important in Baruwa VDC where the communication tower and electricity had been destroyed by the earthquake: the preferred source of information for young people was the VDC Secretary for information from government. Their neighbours were also a trusted source of information.

### Box 17: Feedback from young people on their preferred channels and sources of information

'Through the Internet, we learn a lot and also get information. The Internet has so much information on so many issues.' Participant, youth FGD, Sangachok

'The mobile is pretty handy and you can call anyone right away. We can ask multiple people to cross check the facts. However, Radio and TV gives you the information they like, not what we like. We can listen to the radio and use the Internet from mobile phones.' Participant, youth FGD, Sangachok

'Mobile is all in one, I can hear the radio, use Facebook, call my friends and even play games';  
'We can hear whatever we want by our own choice (through the Internet).'

Participant, youth FGD, Fulpinkot<sup>54</sup>

In the **marginalised communities**, women's preference for face-to-face communication was strongly expressed. The older Majhi **women** in Sangachok VDC (Bhimtar) said they did not understand the information they heard over the radio: 'They speak a different kind of Nepali.' Younger women, by contrast, used their mobiles to communicate and to listen to the radio for their entertainment. **Men** in these marginalised communities did listen to the radio for information from government or organisations, but in Fulpinkot VDC, their preferred source was the Ward Coordinator. He was clearly respected and trusted for his honesty and for giving the right information.

'We can trust our Ward Coordinator because he is an honest man. We have to present our victim's card prior to receiving materials. There have been cases when people forget to bring their cards. When this happens he keeps aside their share and gives it to them later on. Sometimes there are a few people who are unable to go and receive the relief materials themselves. Once he carried the relief materials himself to a sick person's house.' Female participant, Fulpinkot VDC

In Bhimtar the local school teacher was also a trusted source of accurate information, and was seen to be well-informed.

Very rarely were national organisations mentioned as preferred sources of information. In Khokana, an accessible community in the Kathmandu Valley, **men** referred to the Scouts and the Red Cross as accurate sources of information, but this was the only example. And there were few organisations present in less accessible areas. International organisations were never mentioned as preferred sources of information. This does not mean they were redundant as sources of information, but they were not the preferred source, and it is also likely that information provided by international agencies (for example, over the radio) was not identified with those agencies by local people. Also, if they were working through national partners, some had a lower profile at community level.

<sup>54</sup> One young person in Fulpinkot VDC mentioned the newspaper as his most preferred source: 'I can carry the information in my pocket. I forget the messages I hear from the radio but if it's in the paper, I can have a look at it later.' He added that the newspaper does not require electricity and is cheaper compared to other sources. However, newspapers were rarely mentioned as a preferred source of information.

Overall, members of the community who travelled in and out of the village were seen as important sources of information, particularly about conditions in other affected areas, government grants and relief distributions.

### 3.7 The usefulness of information provided

Despite the fact that it was often challenging for people to access information, and there was a general sense from affected communities that their information needs had been poorly met, the study captured how the information they received had been useful.

The **most widely reported benefit** was information that had enabled people to get access to relief, mainly provided by aid agencies. See Table 7. As described above, community leaders and Ward Coordinators in the VDCs informed people about the place and timing of relief distributions, whether from aid organisations or from government, although information that enabled them to access government relief was mentioned by very few people in the FGDs (only three times in this PRA exercise). There were, however, some complaints that aid organisations should be more punctual and respect the advertised timing of the distribution rather than keeping people waiting for long periods, which took recipients away from their work.

The **second most widely reported benefit** was new knowledge around earthquakes. This included better understanding about how earthquakes are caused and measured; how to stay safe when earthquakes occur; how to build earthquake-resistant housing; and the risk of people trafficking in the chaotic period after earthquakes. **Men** in Khokana VDC specifically mentioned learning about the importance of a 'grab-bag', containing valuables, a torch and medicines.

However, many people also commented on the confusion about earthquakes, especially when the second earthquake happened in May when some had been told there would not be a second earthquake (in Sangachok, for example). In the months since the two earthquakes, different sources have provided different information about whether there would, or would not be, another big earthquake. This left people bewildered and unclear about what was rumour and what was fact. They had a lot of questions and wanted more communication to get answers to their questions and to dispel the confusion. In all locations visited, the misleading message about staying safe by hiding under the table was mentioned, and how it had resulted in more deaths. A woman in Fulpinkot VDC explained how people in her village who were in an open space went back into their house to hide under the table and had died when the building collapsed in the quake. As discussed in Section 4.2 below, this appears to be a legacy of 'poor messaging' from the past.

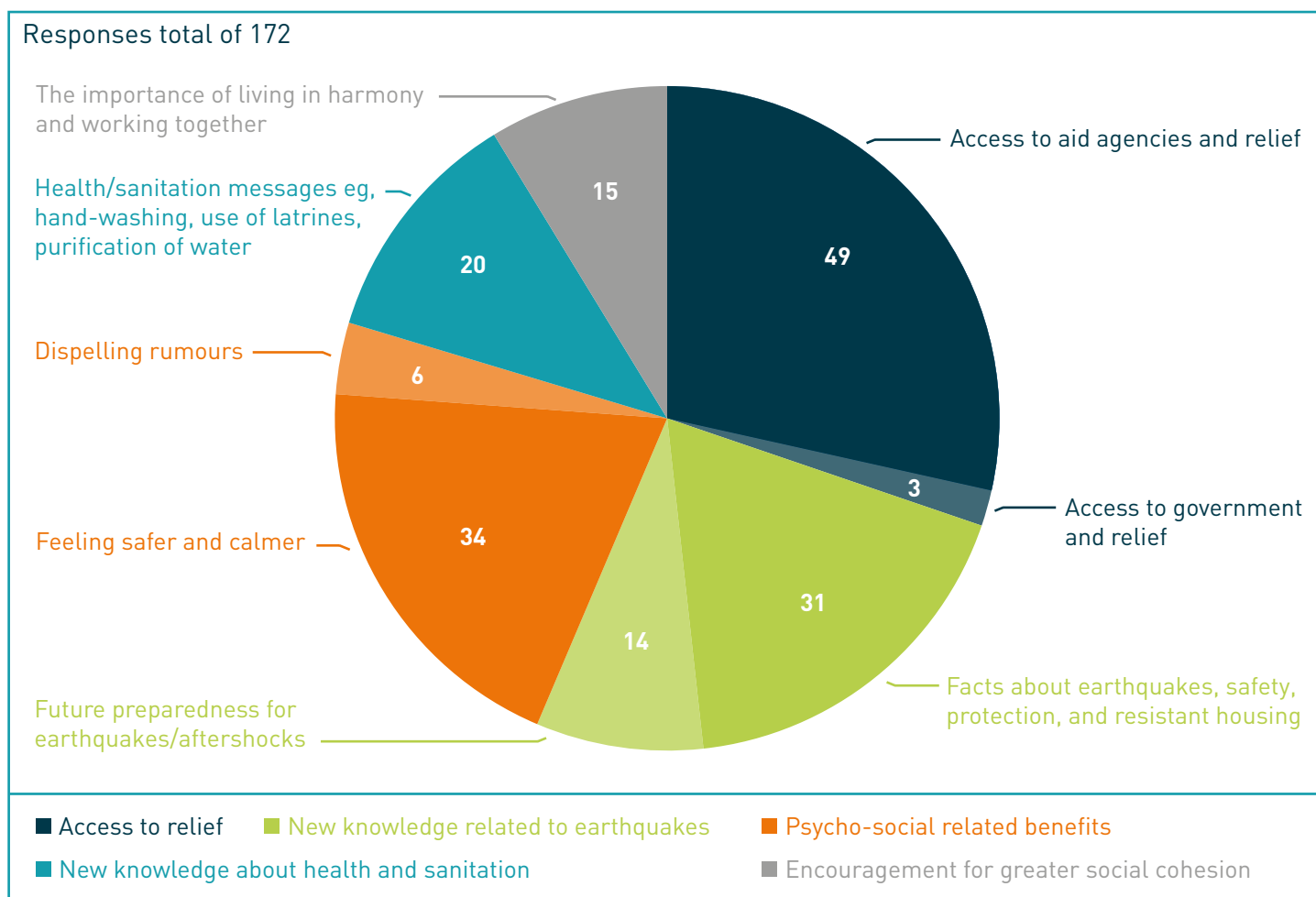
The **third most-widely reported benefit** was psycho-social, where information helped people to feel calmer and safer. Sometimes this came directly from people working in the community, for example, from Buddhist monks who provided counselling in Boudha camp in Kathmandu, and sometimes from radio or other sources. A small number of people referred to the value of dispelling rumours as contributing to them feeling safer or calmer, as did knowing aid was available or on its way. Overall, however, there was a sense that people needed and wanted more information that would help them feel calm, and address their fears.

The usefulness of gaining new knowledge about health and sanitation was less widely reported, and some of this information was available and being disseminated before the earthquakes. Sometimes this came from hoarding boards, especially pictorial messages that could be understood by those who could not read, for example, in Khokana VDC. Hoarding boards were mostly seen in more accessible areas such as Khokana and Boudha camp in the Kathmandu Valley, and in Fulpinkot VDC in Sindhupalchowk. In Boudha camp, women referred to new knowledge they had gained about reproductive health, a direct result of trainings in which they had participated. They also mentioned frequent Saturday workshops on purification of water and tablet distributions, which were said to have been targeted at women and children. In more remote areas like Baruwa, there were no boards with sanitation messages as few organisations had reached these communities. Interestingly, very rarely were leaflets with sanitation messages mentioned.

Some groups (eg, **women and youth** in FGDs in Baruwa and in Khokana VDCs) talked about the positive changes in attitude brought about by the experience of the earthquakes, in terms of encouraging them to live in greater harmony. The earthquakes and frequent aftershocks brought people together, and made them reflect on how short life is and how close to death one can be. One woman described how enemies became friends. Others talked about how conflict over land issues between brothers and neighbours subsided. However, this appeared to be more to do with self-realisation based on personal experience rather than external sources of information.

In the particular case of Boudha camp, where many camp-dwellers had come two to three months after the earthquakes from some of the worst-affected districts, such as Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha and Kavre, their decision to move was clearly influenced by the information they had received, informally, through their personal networks. See Box 18.

**Table 5: Summary from PRA exercises of how information helped**



### Box 18: How information informed household decision-making to move to Boudha camp

In villages in some of the worst earthquake-affected districts, people heard directly from their neighbours, friends and relatives who were already in Boudha camp how they were receiving relief that was more than they were able to access in rural areas. They heard people were provided with food in the camp, and that some agencies were providing education and some children were enrolled in schools in Kathmandu. Women described how they had felt scared from the continuous aftershocks while still in their villages. Thus, on the basis of messages of support, and hearing about the availability of relief in Kathmandu from their friends and relatives already living in the camp, many households took the decision to move to Kathmandu, and specifically to Boudha camp.

## 4. Analysis of what worked/did not work, and why, in CwC efforts

### 4.1 The role for humanitarian responders vs government as providers of information

The extent to which people and communities affected by the earthquakes were looking to government for information, support and guidance to recover and rebuild their homes and their lives came through strongly in the fieldwork. The predominant attitude of affected communities toward aid agencies was that agencies are a temporary presence, providing short-term support, and are not accountable to affected communities. Information received from government about assistance it could provide therefore appears to have been given greater value. See Box 19.

#### Box 19: Feedback from FGDs about the relative role of government and aid agencies

'VDC provides not only information about relief stuff but all the stuff that matters in the villages. More importantly, it shares equally among all the residents. Whereas NGOs go to a specific place and do what they want. So there is no record of their activities and they are not accountable to the locals. It depends who the contact point of these NGOs is. According to the contacts they have, the relief materials are distributed. In such a situation you do not have to be victims, but you just need to know the contact person and you will be able to get relief materials easily.' Participant, men's FGD, Sangachok

'Government officials are the one who should take care of citizens after the earthquake rather than aid agencies.' Participant, men's FGD, Boudha camp

Mostly people looked to government representatives, such as the VDC Secretary and Ward Coordinator, and to government employees at the local level, such as health workers, social workers and teachers, as trusted sources of information. One of the main types of information that people wanted related to land and shelter: how to rebuild houses safely; whether the land was safe; and the kind of government assistance that was available for permanent settlement. Much of this could only be provided by the government.

This finding is not surprising, and resonates with the post-earthquake situation in Haiti in 2010:

**'As in any disaster, much of the information needed by survivors related to services provided by the Haitian authorities and was thus their responsibility... There was considerable demand from survivors for information that could only come from government sources, such as how to replace lost papers, register the dead and claim inheritance.'** (Wall and Chéry, 2010: 46)

In Nepal, there has been much disgruntlement with the government and with its failure to deliver. The CFP CPS results have consistently shown that around 60% of people interviewed were dissatisfied with the government's response, particularly its promises of support that were not forthcoming, unclear plans for assistance, and reconstruction processes taking too long. Dissatisfaction levels were even higher in Sindhupalchowk: in July 2015 in Round 1 of the CPS, more than 90% responded negatively to the statement that 'They were satisfied with what the government were doing'. This dissatisfaction was borne out in the fieldwork discussions for this study. In Boudha camp, for example, **men** commented that: **'Government officials were not active in helping affected people. Even though people went into government offices for help, they did not react properly.'** And **women** complained that **'Government doesn't speak to us or listen to us.'** Yet the women in Boudha camp also said that government officials were their most trusted source of information, seeing them as the only authority that could really address their longer term problems, including finding a permanent solution to their settlement issues as they had been given three months' notice to vacate the camp. This apparent contradiction helps to explain the frustration they expressed.

On the other hand, this feedback implies that agencies need to work more closely with government, at all levels. Indeed, **government and aid agencies not working together was seen as a barrier to the provision of information** in a men's FGD in Fulpinkot. And in Boudha camp people said that the content of information from agencies should be more focused on how government plans to address the problems faced by quake victims. This means agencies working more closely with government representatives and employees at the local level to disseminate information, and more actively supporting government in its outreach and communication with affected communities from a capacity strengthening perspective.

At the national level international agencies did make attempts to support government, but these appear to have been limited and not always welcomed. Although Nepal has a Ministry of Information and Communication, this is more concerned with external communication and public relations than communication with communities. This implies that collaboration with sectoral ministries on CwC may be more productive. Some progress was made at sectoral ministry level, particularly with the Ministry of Health in developing health-related messages, but connections with focal points in other sectoral ministries do not seem to have been strong and certainly not as strong as in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, which may offer valuable learning for Nepal<sup>55</sup>. There appears to be scope for agencies to work more closely with government at the district level, supporting the office of the District Development Committee in clarifying assistance that government was able to provide, and in disseminating that information to affected people (although it should be noted that many district government officers were themselves unclear about the assistance that national government was providing).

However, the fundamental mismatch between the capacity of the generally well-staffed international humanitarian community and the capacity of government, which is usually understaffed in the wake of a major disaster, at both national and local levels, must be acknowledged. As was evident in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan<sup>56</sup>, the government in Nepal did not have the resources (human or financial) to meet the transaction costs associated with attending numerous meetings held by, and with, humanitarian agencies. A different form of collaboration was required whereby agencies should have been supporting and enhancing government capacity.

#### 4.2 The information people wanted, the information they received, and what agencies were providing

The type of information people wanted was significantly different immediately after the earthquakes and seven months later. See Table 6, which summarises the results from the PRA exercises.

In the first weeks and months after the earthquakes there was probably a better match between the information that people said they wanted and needed, and the type/categories of information that humanitarian responders were providing, in comparison with seven months later. This also reflects the clusters that the CwC Working Group was able to work with most closely, including WASH and protection.

But the detail of the messaging that agencies were providing may not have been so 'spot on'. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes the need for information about how to survive the frequent aftershocks and future quakes emerges clearly from the fieldwork, and a number of agencies were providing this. Local people talked about how the 'Richter word' had become well known as their knowledge of earthquakes expanded<sup>57</sup>. But there was also a sense that people still wanted much more information about earthquakes, especially to dispel or confirm rumours, and that the information available was not reaching all groups. Many people, often women, who were scared and traumatised, wanted to know whether there would be another big earthquake, but agencies simply could not respond to this need since earthquakes cannot be accurately predicted.

<sup>55</sup> See Wall and Chéry (2010) on how organisations supported the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Culture and Communication after the Haiti earthquake although, as they acknowledge, the impact of this work has not been evaluated.

<sup>56</sup> See Buchanan-Smith et al, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Young people in Sangachok said their greater knowledge of how to measure earthquakes meant they could now tell if it was an aftershock or an earthquake.



The record in how behavioural change messaging reached people is mixed. It was striking how many people in the different locations visited had heard about human trafficking and the precautions to take, although many already knew about this from before the earthquakes. In just one group of young people, in Bhimtar, in Sangachowk, was this new information. Agencies had serious concerns that the risk of human trafficking could increase as women bore the brunt of the impact of the disaster: in agriculture, which is largely female-dominated; through losing jobs related to tourism; by taking on additional caring responsibilities; and as time spent on water and firewood collection rose in some districts<sup>58</sup>. Some local government officers had also expressed their concerns about increased human trafficking in the wake of the earthquake<sup>59</sup>. Thus, messaging on this does seem to have been appropriate.

A number of agencies appear to have prioritised health and sanitation messaging, and to have persisted with dissemination of this, for example, through jingles on the radio. But the match between information provided, often targeted at longer-term behavioural change (eg, hand washing, where to defecate) and what people needed and found useful immediately after the earthquakes is not so evident. Some messages related to short-term action encouraging people to consume clean water (eg, using water purifiers). This was regarded as inappropriate and unaffordable by many local people.

And, as mentioned above, the message to ‘hide under the table’ if there is an earthquake, which apparently encouraged some children to run inside when the earthquakes occurred<sup>60</sup>, appears to be a legacy from the past when it was not sufficiently contextualised to make it clear that this was relevant for people already inside a building. This example of poor messaging that was wrongly interpreted was given considerable attention in the media after the earthquakes. To their credit, agencies quickly tried to reiterate more appropriate messaging about how to stay safe in future earthquakes and aftershocks<sup>61</sup>. The learning here is about encouraging people to develop situational awareness and to act appropriately, rather than focusing on a specific instruction.

**Table 6: Comparison from the PRA exercises on the information needed immediately after the earthquakes and seven months later**

People’s main information needs	
Immediately after earthquake	Seven months later
<b>Preparedness messages</b> relating to aftershocks and how to survive	<b>Government support:</b> access to grants, information, entitlement and support plans
<b>WASH messages</b> relating to water and sanitation eg, access to clean water	<b>Access to relief:</b> for winter (clothes, blankets), training, income generation, agricultural support
<b>Shelter:</b> temporary housing, access to building materials, and building earthquake resistant housing	<b>WASH:</b> improved sanitation and access to latrines
<b>Health:</b> access to medicines, rescue, and treatment of injuries, nutrition advice and health training	<b>Education:</b> access to education, reopening of schools and current policies for support
<b>Relief:</b> access to relief, timings of distributions, entitlements	<b>Shelter:</b> reconstruction and entitlements
<b>Government support:</b> access to grants, distribution information and entitlements	
<b>Facts about the earthquake</b>	
<b>Psycho-social support</b>	

<sup>58</sup> See the ‘Gender Equality Update No.3’, produced by the Gender Working Group on 9 July 2015.

<sup>59</sup> See also <http://www.governancenow.com/news/regular-story/girls-interrupted>

<sup>60</sup> The evidence suggests it was a very small number of children involved, although it has attracted widespread attention.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Drop, cover, hold on’ is still the global standard message for people inside a building when an earthquake happens.

Seven months after the earthquakes the predominant need for information was around long-term shelter and settlement solutions, and what support and guidance government would provide. This was a need that international agencies were unable to meet. As the representative of a local NGO explained, there is a political element to this: affected people holding government to account for what it should/had promised to provide.

This is sensitive territory for international agencies, but it is one where local civil society can play an important role. While a number of international staff working for international agencies were clearly aware that this was the predominant need seven months after the earthquakes, there was a sense of agencies persisting with their well-worn and long-term messaging, for example around health and sanitation, although this was not necessarily meeting the needs of the moment.

Another major area of concern was winterisation. People knew about staying warm and healthy but had very limited resources, such as blankets and warm clothes, to do so, and were desperate for information about assistance that would be provided to them (and which mostly seems to have been delivered late)<sup>62</sup>.

One area where information needs do not appear to have been adequately met was in addressing people's fear and trauma, in other words addressing their psycho-social needs. Although there clearly were benefits from the information provided, as indicated in Section 3.7, and more was achieved in some locations than others, women's FGDs often mentioned that they needed more information and support to help them feel calm and to deal with trauma.

There appears to be an information dimension to dealing with trauma, as well as a programming dimension. In line with their expressed preference for face-to-face communication, women particularly wanted people to come and talk to them. Two positive examples were cited during the fieldwork of how women had received psycho-social support. In Fulpinkot, a religious group had led women in a meditation session that they said had helped them to feel calm. In Boudha camp, as mentioned above, Buddhist monks had played this role, again in person, with the women in the camp. In Sangachok, a teacher told us how national organisations, such as the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) and Tuki Association Sunkhosi, had trained them to provide psychological counselling. Although they said this started late, it nevertheless indicates a potentially valuable role that local professionals can play. Overall, however, there appears to have been an unmet need for psycho-social programming support.

Table 6 attempts to give a sense of the match between the information that local people wanted and agencies' CwC efforts, based on the research at community level and on interviews with agency staff engaged in CwC. This table builds on the categorisation of CwC initiatives presented in Table 2 earlier in the report.



<sup>62</sup> For example, Government grants for winterisation did not materialise until mid-January 2016.

**Table 7: Match between local people’s information needs and agency priorities in CwC**

Type of information	Local people’s main information needs	Information prioritised by agencies in their CwC efforts	Comments
Emergency survival	High	High	Although close match, still confusion and unmet information needs
Information about government grants, loans and assistance	High	Low	Internews OpenMic attempted to address confusion about government assistance and entitlement in its bulletins, but this was generally not part of agency messaging
Behaviour change – human trafficking	Not articulated	Medium	Raised awareness, although many people had existing knowledge
Behaviour change – health and WASH	Medium	High	Some agency messaging not in line with local people’s priorities/needs or with local knowledge or what is feasible eg, women wanted to know how to access medicines, what support they would get to stay warm and healthy in winter, while agencies were more likely to emphasise how to ensure clean water, eg, through the use of water purifiers
Psycho-social support	High	Medium	Limited psycho-social support provided in person
Information about agency programming	Medium	Medium	Regarded as useful by local people, especially related to relief distribution
Dispelling rumours	Medium	Medium	Close match between need and agency prioritisation. But effectiveness in dispelling rumours more questionable, partly reflecting the scale of the challenge and the relatively small scale of the Internews OpenMic project
Feedback to agencies from communities on their needs and how they are being met	Medium	Low	NB: This was not explored in detail in this study so this is a tentative score reflecting what we heard from local people about how they felt they had not been consulted about their needs, and there was some inappropriate relief programming

These findings highlight a weakness in how many agency communicating with communities’ activities are currently being implemented. There is much emphasis on the outflow and dissemination of information but without sufficient monitoring and follow-up at the community level to find out if and how the information is being received, whether it is meeting local people’s information needs, and whether it is making a difference.

#### 4.3 The match between local people’s preferred and trusted channels and sources of information, and information channels used by agencies

There appears to be a bigger mismatch between local people’s preferred channels and sources of information and the channels used by humanitarian responders in their communication efforts, than between the information needs of affected people and what was provided by humanitarian responders.

While local people valued radio and TV for general news and information, they expressed a strong preference for face-to-face communication and dialogue for information that was directly relevant to them and their needs. While men particularly looked to local government representatives, such as the VDC Secretary and Ward Coordinator, as their preferred and trusted sources of information, women were more likely to look to government employees, such as social workers, health workers and teachers. This resonates with the findings of BBC Media Action's research across a number of countries:

'...while mass media is effective at reaching large numbers of people with potentially life-saving information across a range of topics, it is less effective at providing more context-specific, localised information that people also need'. (Hannides, 2015: 6)

This preference for face-to-face communication was also clear from the Internews' qualitative assessment on CwC carried out in May 2015 in Chautara and surrounding areas in Sindhupalchowk. Indeed, it may have been even more pressing at that time, as few people had access to other information channels, including radio, immediately after the earthquakes (Internews, 2015). Based on their assessment, Internews recommended that agencies use both face-to-face communication and radio in their CwC efforts, echoing findings from the 2010 Haiti earthquake study that a 'multi-channel' approach to communication was the most successful (Wall and Chéry, 2010).

## Box 20: Reflections on the role of teachers, social workers and health workers in providing information

A teacher in Fulpinkot explained the role that he played:

**'Most of the people understood (information transmitted by radio) and those who did not understand were given further explanations by others. Since we are in the teaching profession, we were often called to explain the message. People were called to a certain place and then an explanation was given, sometimes even a demonstration was done to clarify the message related to sanitation, water purification and/or safety measures.'** Teacher, Fulpinkot

The Chairperson of a primary school in Baruwa described how:

**'People come to me and tell me their problems. They communicate through telephone and I inform them about the programmes. They have problems of drinking water, lack of road accessibility, winter is arriving, and people want support for shelter. I inform them about the relief distributions, that aid agencies are going to come for the distribution. I get information through the VDC, and sometimes from Bhotang, where I have a relative in the VDC.'** Chairperson, primary school, Baruwa

A healthworker in Boudha camp described her role and experience:

**'I give information about organisations to the people. I also call the organisation myself; tell them about the problems of these people and ask if they could help. I basically am communicating two ways... (Organisations) provide messages, but they are not understood by all. We had a Vitamin A camp here for four days. We had to explain to people face-to-face. The camp was here for four days but people came on the fifth day and requested us to provide them (with Vitamin A) after the camp. It is always good to provide face-to-face information; no other media has been effective, people do not pay attention to such messages either on TV, radio or hoarding boards. "You listen, you forget; you see you remember; you do, you understand".'** Health worker, Boudha camp

Despite this feedback from the Internews assessment, many humanitarian responders appear to have favoured radio over face-to-face communication in their efforts to communicate with the affected population. Radio has been a relatively cheap and easy way for agencies to broadcast their messages, apparently to scale. And it became an important source of revenue for community radio stations, in some cases replacing the need for advertising.

Interviews with agency staff indicated a widespread assumption that their messaging via radio, especially through community FM radio, was reaching a large number of rural people because surveys showed that radio is widely listened to. However, this assumption does not appear to have been well tested, and some agency staff did question whether information communicated via community radio was actually reaching many people. At least one agency key informant reflected that radio programming tended to focus on agency priorities, eg, WASH and health messages, while local people's priorities are around shelter, such as how to safely rebuild.

Feedback from the fieldwork indicates that people listen to the radio for two main reasons: for entertainment (often listening to music); and for news and political analysis, the latter being of particular interest to the more politically active. And that men listen to the radio more than women. The findings also suggest that some of the radio programming may even have been futile. For example, messaging targeted at women during the day when they are working in the fields: as already noted, the women spoken with during the fieldwork said they only listen early in the morning or in the evening. Another impression from the research is that men listened to radio mainly to hear news, and that announcements and jingles were not having much impact. This was seen to be the case especially for messaging around WASH which was seen by local people to be inappropriate and unaffordable, such as information about purifying drinking water.

Where radio may have played a more important role is in providing people with information about forthcoming relief distributions.

The overall effectiveness of community radio in CwC deserves deeper and more focused investigation than has been possible in this study, through further qualitative studies to explore some of these issues in more depth.

Although some agencies used leaflets and pamphlets for communication, with one agency staff member describing 'masses of leaflets available at distribution centres', it was striking how rarely these were mentioned or referred to in the FGDs.

Where agencies had a strong presence on the ground they were better able to meet the demand for face-to-face communication, especially if spending time in the community was an organisational priority and was adequately resourced. An example is World Vision's dedicated team of accountability staff. The work of Accountability Lab is another example. As described in Section 2.3, Accountability Lab has five volunteer journalists covering 10 VDCs in Sindhupalchowk, running a Mobile Citizens Helpdesk. Although this is a very people-oriented approach, and an important way of informing rumour tracking for Internews' OpenMic, it operates on a very small scale. Even though one of the fieldwork locations was in one of the VDCs covered by Accountability Lab, it was striking that no one we met appeared to have had contact with this initiative. However, this was not entirely surprising as each VDC comprises many different villages and each volunteer journalist was covering two VDCs.

As all international NGOs had to work through local organisations, some acknowledged the challenge of depending on the social mobilisers of the local partners for communicating with communities, when these social mobilisers were fulfilling multiple tasks, facing many pressures, and were not always well-trained.

#### **4.4 Reaching different groups: constraining and facilitating factors**

##### **Accessibility factor**

While the information needs were very similar between communities that were accessible and those that were more remote, unsurprisingly the more accessible locations were better served, both with information and with relief. In some respects the best-served locations were those in the Kathmandu Valley: in Boudha camp, and also in Khokana, where women talked of the face-to-face provision of information through training on reproductive health, personal protection and sanitation. Meanwhile, in Fulpinkot, one of the less accessible VDCs visited, residents reported much less access to both information and relief:

**'It is the police and army who dare to walk all the way to provide relief to us, but the organisations seem reluctant to walk all the way to us.'** Female, Fulpinkot



Yet, strangely, the perception even in more accessible VDCs, such as Sangachok, was that less accessible areas had been prioritised. As already noted in Section 3.5, in all of the locations visited, people seemed to be of the opinion that other communities had been better served. This may be due to people wanting to convey a message to the research team that they had been poorly served and their expectation that the research team could do something about this. It may also reflect the fact that many of their needs had still not been met.

The challenge for agencies has been how to work at scale in providing information to affected communities in Nepal's mountainous environment. This helps to explain why they often favoured radio as a medium to reach as many people as possible, despite the limitations this research reveals. Engaging in more face-to-face communication in this context is a daunting task.

### Gender, generational and cultural factors <sup>63</sup>

As already noted, the study findings show that men were generally able to access a wider range of information sources than women, and that they had preferential access to local government officials, such as VDC Secretaries and Ward Coordinators, who are themselves usually men. Meanwhile women, who are often less well-educated, especially in rural areas, relied on a tighter and smaller personal network of information sources, including family members and neighbours, as well as health workers and social workers in their communities.

As many field-based aid agency staff are male, some aid workers questioned whether women were being adequately reached during efforts to consult local communities. This report, and the CPS results, imply not.

While the information needs of marginalised groups interviewed for this study were very similar to other groups, two differences became apparent. These differences reflect the prevailing social and cultural constructs in Nepalese society.

1. First, their networks and social connections were generally weaker than for other ethnic and higher caste groups.
2. Second (and related), they tended to be less pro-active (especially dalit women) in seeking out information than higher caste men and women, such as Brahmin and Chetri.

With low levels of education marginalized groups are thus at risk of missing out on information received by other groups. Where marginalised groups live in less-accessible wards, for example, the Majhi in Bhimtar, Sangachowk, these factors are compounded by their geographical remoteness. Despite being a priority for many national and international organisations in relief distribution, these groups appeared to lack information in comparison to other groups. Relief materials were handed over, but beneficiaries were provided with little information, such as about sanitation and trafficking issues, and some lamented the lack of face-to-face communication with aid providers.

The much wider range of information sources used by young people compared with their parents and older generations was striking, especially their preference for, and use of, the Internet. In at least two locations visited, young people played an important role in informing the rest of the community, in many ways acting as a bridge between their group and the external world. It is not clear if, or how, this role of younger people was recognised by agencies investing in CwC, and it implies there may be some untapped potential. In Khokana, men and young people stressed the importance of mobilising community youth to play a more prominent role in communication and information sharing. Young people seemed particularly keen to play this role, although this was (once again) articulated in relation to government, which was their main focus, rather than agencies.

**'Government shouldn't always neglect us. Instead, they should take us as partners, then we can make a difference in the time of crisis.'** Participant, youth FGD, Khokana

<sup>63</sup> For background on inclusion and exclusion in Nepal, related to gender, ethnicity and caste, see, for example, Bennett, (2005); Pradhan (2006); and Hachhetu (2003).

## Box 21: The role of youth in disseminating information

In Boudha camp, young people were active users of social media, including Facebook, and were particularly concerned to access information about the risk of future earthquakes. Girls talked about how they shared such information with other family members and friends, while some of the boys were actively seeking out and sharing information about their respective family's entitlement to government support.

In Khokana, young people similarly passed on information to family members and to the wider community, especially in this Newar community, where older people did not speak or understand Nepali.

### 4.5 Reflections on agency CwC practice in Nepal

#### Prioritisation given to CwC, and how it was implemented in practice

Much attention was given to communicating with communities by both humanitarian agencies and media development organisations in the Nepal earthquake response. But in practice there appears to have been more emphasis on the outflow of information and on messaging to affected communities – which is certainly the view of affected people themselves – rather than on dialogue as part of agencies' accountability commitments, or indeed spending time listening to feedback from affected people. As the DEC review concluded:

**'Agencies ... need to work harder at hearing communities. In the words of one expert key informant: "Now we need to listen to people, and not only focus on how we communicate with them. It is really important that communication strategies are based on what people are telling us they want and need".'**

(Sanderson et al, 2015: 21)

Of course there are exceptions to this. Some agencies have made AAP an organisational commitment and have deployed staff at field level dedicated to promoting accountability. In practice, this often means that there is a greater focus on face-to-face communication and dialogue. Conversely, there were cases cited by some INGO staff about how the emphasis on 'CwC' meant that the organisation's Communications Officer for Nepal was asked to lead on CwC, and to combine both an external communications role and communication with affected communities. In these cases communicating with communities' efforts suffered as the Communications Officer spent more time on external communications (60% in the case of one Communications Officer), reflecting the prevailing power dynamics expressed through financial resources.

These examples indicate that the 'lesson' from earlier CwC efforts – including responses to the 2010 Haiti earthquake and Typhoon Bopha in 2013<sup>64</sup> – of trying to combine external communications and CwC roles is not an effective approach has not been learned.

**'Communication with affected communities is a completely separate area of work – and a different technical skill – compared to conventional external relations or international media liaison [and requires] a dedicated technical specialist with resources.'** (Wall and Chéry, 2010: 6)

Overall, there was a sense that there is still distance to travel in terms of sectoral technical staff taking on CwC as part of their responsibility, at agency level and collaboratively. Members of the CwC Working Group described their struggle to encourage some of the sectoral clusters to engage with the importance of CwC, where their focus was on distribution of relief materials rather than on the provision of information. One senior agency key informant recommended that CwC be elevated to become a cluster. It was felt this would give it sufficient clout in the overall response and with other sectoral clusters.

<sup>64</sup> See CDAC (2013) which concludes in its 'lessons learned' from Typhoon Bopha that: 'CwC is not the same as external communication, and different staff need to be involved.' (ibid:5)

## Lack of needs assessments, and monitoring of feedback

As described above, local people often felt they had not been adequately consulted by agencies to determine their needs – whether for information or in terms of relief. In at least one location there was a clear difference in perspective between the agencies operating in the VDC and local people. According to the INGO staff member:

**‘During the emergency phase we have to do rapid assessments, we cannot take time in such conditions. So we do not spend time on in-depth research. We go to the place and carry out some interviews with the people and on the basis of that we provide services. We include a monitoring process alongside, so that if we have missed anyone we can help them, too. For that we continue to survey through volunteers, contacts and to consult the VDCs and district level stakeholders.’**

This probably indicates a difference in expectation. Local people expected more in-depth consultation and the opportunity to engage with agency staff directly. Agencies felt they did not have the time or capacity to do more than rapid assessments, and/or carried out inter-agency assessments, such as consultations with children to gain an overall perspective of needs (Withers and Dahal, 2015)<sup>65</sup>. However, where local people fed back that the assistance that agencies had provided was not in line with their priorities, as in the solar power example in Section 3.6, this is concerning. In addition, where agencies appear to have only consulted with community leaders, who can act as influential ‘gatekeepers’ to the community, the information they receive does not necessarily reflect wider community views.

It was also concerning that few agencies were monitoring whether their CwC efforts were meeting the needs of affected people, and having an impact, despite their investment in different communication activities. Some agency staff, particularly NGO staff, acknowledged that they struggled to know how to do this.

The Haiti study, ‘Let Them Speak’, drew attention to the lack of monitoring and evaluation models for CwC in 2010 (Wall and Chéry, 2010). Six years later, although many surveys were carried out in the Nepal earthquake response, providing general feedback from affected people about how well their information needs were/were not being met, the impact of individual agency CwC efforts, and of collective CwC efforts, were not well monitored or understood. This is where more qualitative studies similar to this one could make a valuable contribution.

## Coordination of CwC activities among humanitarian responders

Before the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, a communications group already existed under the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC). This group, which was officially chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs (which has responsibility for preparedness and response in Nepal) had developed some messaging in advance.

Immediately after the first earthquake, this group became the CwC Working Group. It still used the structure and contacts of the NRRC Communications Group, but the Ministry of Home Affairs was no longer actively engaged because it had many other competing priorities. UNICEF took over as the chair of the CwC Working Group, which worked to support sectoral clusters and aimed to ensure that relevant and appropriate information reached affected communities.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Nepal’s Children Speak Out’ was based on consultation with almost 2,000 children across 14 districts. This provided important information on children’s perspectives and needs, and on patterns emerging across those 14 districts, but was not an exercise in community-by-community consultation.

The efforts invested in coordination of CwC<sup>66</sup> have been welcomed by agency staff interviewed for this study, although they commented that the CwC Working Group has mainly been used for information sharing between agencies and mapping what each agency is doing. There have been attempts to develop 'key messages,' but in practice each agency has tended to develop its own CwC messaging, leading the DEC reviewers to comment that:

'Many organisations, however, are focusing on individual communication efforts, which has resulted in "a confusing bombardment of messages". Rather than this being due to a dearth of information, [the CwC Working Group] believes this is due to communities receiving information that does not resonate with them [the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project's first Community Survey found that the information respondents mostly need concerns government decisions and how to get shelter materials]'. (Sanderson et al, 2015: 20-21)

The lack of coordination around key messages is evident at the district level. In Sindhupalchowk, different international agencies broadcast their own WASH messages, for instance, each with their own 'jingle,' at different times through the same community radio station and without apparently coordinating with each other. Radio Sindhu, a community radio station operating out of Chautara in Sindhupalchok, adopted a different approach, establishing its own coordination mechanism following the earthquakes, and creating a 'Content Advisory Group' (CAG) which was meeting on a monthly basis. It was beyond the scope of this study to assess how effectively the CAG coordinated messaging by different agencies, but a description of the workings of the CAG are presented in Box 22. Interestingly, communities consulted in this study did not mention that they had been bombarded with confusing messages; their concern was more that some of their key information needs, for example, around shelter, had not been met.

### Box 22: Radio Sindhu's Content Advisory Group for coordinating messaging

Radio Sindhu's Content Advisory Group (CAG) was formed in August/September 2015. Members of the CAG include representatives from District Development Committees, the District Health Office, Nepal police, Women's organisations, the Children's Club, and some humanitarian organisations.

The CAG meets monthly to discuss and agree content for the coming month. Members of Radio Sindhu also visit villages and consult local people to discuss their issues and concerns, and to gather feedback on programmes broadcast by Radio Sindhu. This information and feedback is discussed at CAG meetings and content adapted accordingly.

Not all programming decisions pass through the CAG, however. Organisations (eg, NGOs) paying for particular broadcasts often discuss and agree upon the content directly with the Radio Sindhu team, effectively bypassing the CAG process.

### Partnerships between media organisations and humanitarian agencies

Although a number of media organisations played a key role in CwC, and in some cases worked closely with humanitarian agencies (for example Internews OpenMic's dissemination of its weekly bulletins to humanitarian agencies and BBC Media Action's work with CARE), more could be done to strengthen the relationship between humanitarian agencies and media organisations. Indeed there was evidence of some tension in the relationship between these different stakeholder groups. The media organisations were frustrated by the time it often took humanitarian agencies to respond to a request for information, saying that this could take up to three days if the request had to pass through agency and cluster approval mechanisms, yet the information required was often time-sensitive. Some media agencies found it hard to get humanitarian agencies to engage with them, especially early on, when they were looking for messages or programming ideas – although at least one agency staff member said this gradually improved as agencies provided sectoral experts for advice and comment.

<sup>66</sup> This resonates with one of the 'Lessons for Operational Agencies' published by ALNAP soon after the earthquakes hit, that 'agencies need to collaborate more to ensure that the information presented is not contradictory' (Sanderson and Ramalingam, 2015: 16).



In addition, with a few exceptions (such as Oxfam's support of Radio Sindhu) there seemed to be limited understanding about, and capacity to partner with, local media within aid agencies. It seems that in the Nepal response, aid agencies more often instrumentalised local media rather than treating them as legitimate partners as they sought to buy time for broadcasting their agency-specific messages.

The different organisational culture of media organisations and humanitarian agencies may explain some of the tension and challenges of working in partnership. Media organisations are often staffed by journalists used to producing material fast and under pressure. They often view humanitarian agencies as overly bureaucratic and risk averse, with a tendency to treat CwC in the same way they treat sign-off of their external communications which must go through a formal process of approval.

Ways of addressing these differences in culture and process are important, so that the full potential of these different stakeholder groups working together can be realised.





## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

Humanitarian responders – international and national aid agencies and media support organisations – have collectively put much effort into ‘communicating with communities’ in their response to the Nepal earthquakes, in extremely challenging physical terrain. This is indicative of a growing commitment to meeting the information needs of affected people and communities.

This study set out to hear the perspectives and experiences of the affected people themselves, in terms of the extent to which they felt their information needs had/had not been met, and the reasons why, in order to better understand the ‘added value’ of communicating with communities’ activities, and how they could be strengthened to better meet the needs of affected people. It has been an opportunity to reflect on the CwC work of humanitarian responders in the wider context, taking account of the many different ways in which local people access and use information in the wake of a major natural disaster.

Most people affected by disaster have a wide range of information needs, and a wide range of channels and sources they are drawing on, hour by hour, day by day, and week by week. How to draw a boundary around the information they say they need and that they receive is therefore a challenging and complex task. However, the qualitative approach used in this study has provided a valuable opportunity to explore the complexity around information needed and received by different population groups, and by communities in different locations. It builds on the findings of the predominantly quantitative surveys that had been done so far, providing nuance and insights to the statistics and figures that have generally shown low levels of satisfaction – not only with the overall humanitarian response but also with information available about assistance.

Findings show how information needs changed over time. Immediately after the earthquakes, information needs were urgent. Many of these needs related to immediate survival: how to treat the injured and get immediate assistance; how to find temporary shelter; how to cope and stay safe with the numerous aftershocks; and how to access healthcare and clean water. There was also a hunger for news about other areas affected by the earthquakes, and the numbers of casualties and deaths elsewhere. Seven months later, information needs related to longer-term solutions: how and where to rebuild safely; and how to survive the winter in cold temporary shelters. There was a demand and need for information about how people would be supported, especially by government, amidst many rumours and contradictory messages about their entitlements.

Humanitarian responders were better oriented to meeting people’s information needs immediately after the earthquakes when the focus was short-term survival. But while they judged quite well the type of information people needed, the detail of some of their messages was not well-grounded in the reality of people’s lives and the resources available to them, in rural villages or in camps, for example, around access to safe water. There was a sense from people interviewed that some of the solutions being offered were neither pragmatic nor sustainable, and did not take account of people’s existing knowledge and practices. This was amplified by their sense that they had not been adequately consulted by humanitarian agencies. Seven months after the earthquakes, humanitarian responders have been much less able to meet the overwhelming need for information about entitlement to, and delivery of, government support.

In terms of information channels and the means of communication, the study reveals a distinction between people’s need for general news, and their need for information immediately relevant to their own circumstances and rebuilding and recovering their lives. Radio and TV were the preferred sources for general news, while there was a strong preference for more personalised information channels, especially face-to-face and by mobile phone, for more personally relevant information. People wanted to get this kind of information from those they know and trust, for example, local government officials, and in a way where they can ask questions and seek clarification. Local people’s preference for face-to-face communication resonates with research findings in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan. Although a much more literate population than Nepal’s, the preference of people in the Philippines was the same:

**‘The overwhelming message from local communities is their preference for face-to-face communication, because of the human interaction and the opportunity for dialogue.’** (Buchanan-Smith et al, 2015)

This is where a mismatch arises. Humanitarian responders relied to a great extent on radio broadcasting in their CwC efforts, taking advantage of Nepal's extensive network of community FM radio as well as more trusted national radio stations. But findings indicate they may have overestimated the outreach and impact of radio in meeting people's needs, especially meeting the need for information that is directly relevant to their personal recovery. Many households had lost their radios in their earthquakes, and women were much less likely to listen to the radio than men. Also, high dependence on radio cannot satisfy local people's desire to engage in dialogue, to check out the facts, and to seek clarification where there have been confusing and contradictory messages.

Despite widespread acknowledgement that CwC is as much about listening and feedback as about the provision of information, the study findings indicate that, in practice, CwC efforts still tend to emphasise the outflow of information. As a study of the 2010 Haiti earthquake concluded:

'Models that facilitate genuine dialogue and facilitate listening to the perspectives and concerns of local populations are far rarer yet much more effective on multiple levels... Agencies still see "communication" as primarily the process of delivering or extracting information.' (Wall and Chéry, 2010: 5).

Six years later, after the Nepal earthquakes, the same conclusions appear to hold.

The challenges for humanitarian responders to implement this kind of model and to meet affected people's preference for face-to-face communication in the mountainous environment of Nepal with small, scattered and remote settlements, are immense. Yet some local people offered solutions – see the 'Recommendations' below.

Other factors that have affected the effectiveness of CwC initiatives include:

- Accessibility, with less accessible communities having been poorly served and some barely reached.
- Education levels, especially literacy, making it harder to reach older people, for example, with clear and understandable information.
- Social networks and exposure of individuals and communities to the outside world.

Women in rural areas are more likely to have close personal networks that they depend upon for information, closer to home, and are therefore harder to reach with information provided from external sources. This may partly explain their higher levels of dissatisfaction expressed in the CPS. Marginalised groups with limited social networks are also harder to reach with information. While aid agencies appear to have been sensitive to some of the hierarchies in Nepalese society in their relief distribution, for example, making special efforts to reach marginalised dalit groups, these efforts were less apparent in their efforts to communicate.

Overall, a picture emerges of patchiness in the extent to which information needs were met. Some communities and groups were better served with information if they were accessible, had strong connections beyond the village, and pro-actively sought information. Those that are less accessible and without such networks (which may represent the majority of rural communities) were generally poorly served.

The findings of this study also help to put agency efforts in context. Most people interviewed were looking first and foremost to the Nepali government for information, and to support them, especially in the longer term with housing and rebuilding their livelihoods. They saw agencies as providing short-term assistance, with a short-term presence and much less accountability. Despite the challenges that many agencies have faced in working more closely with the government, the feedback from local people implies the imperative to do so – and the limitations of what humanitarian responders can achieve on their own.

## 5.2 Recommendations for the Way Forward

### 1. Collaborate with Government on Communicating with Communities

Humanitarian responders must collaborate more closely with government in their communicating with communities activities, as part of preparedness, response and medium-term recovery efforts

**Affected people principally turn to government for information and to find long-term solutions to their post-earthquake needs. Humanitarian responders need to collaborate more closely with governments, at both national and local levels, in their CwC efforts.**

**In Nepal**, preparedness for future crises should involve mapping the roles and focal points of all ministries so the international community knows in advance who to liaise with in terms of communication with the affected population. Ways of doing this could be informed by the Haiti crisis where the international humanitarian community, through CDAC Haiti, appointed a Government Liaison Officer to develop a strong partnership between the government and international agencies, and engage in capacity development with the government.

**Who Should Do This:** The UN should provide leadership, especially at national level, supported by other agencies at national and district levels

### 2. Put the 'Human' Back into Humanitarian Communication

Humanitarian responders need to **be more 'people-oriented'** in their **communications with affected communities**, investing in more face-to-face communication

**Humanitarian responders must not lose contact and connection with local people and their needs. This starts with good communication to ground the response, including the provision of information, and ensure it meets needs. This will positively influence and strengthen the overall relationship between humanitarian responders and affected people.**

**In Nepal**, despite the availability of information technology and the relative ease of using mass communication, including radio, there needs to be a shift from the current focus on mass media to greater emphasis on face-to-face communication. Ways of doing this, suggested by affected people themselves, include:

- a. Agencies obtaining the telephone numbers of VDC Secretaries and Ward Coordinators and calling them regularly with information to alert communities<sup>67</sup>
- b. Identifying key 'trusted sources' at village level, to whom local people naturally turn for information, in order to pass on information and messaging from agencies, eg, social workers, health workers and teachers<sup>68</sup>
- c. Exploring how community-based sectoral committees (eg, WASH committees) could play a wider information dissemination role
- d. Involving younger people in CwC initiatives, recognising their use of a wide range of communication channels, including social media and the internet, and encouraging them to play a more active role in sharing information with their communities.

<sup>67</sup> Some agencies were already doing this to provide information about forthcoming relief distributions. These efforts should build on their good practices.

<sup>68</sup> There is learning here from other contexts, eg, South Sudan and Afghanistan, where focal points and information areas have been established at local level. In Nepal the VDC would be an appropriate institutional location for such a focal point at local level, reflecting that this is a key source of information used by local people.

**In addition:**

- e. Agencies and their staff should be incentivised to spend more time listening and responding to affected people<sup>69</sup>; such listening should become a donor requirement<sup>70</sup>
- f. In Nepal, the Mobile Citizens HelpDesk and Internews Open Mic project offer valuable models for listening to affected people and addressing rumours that should be scaled up in future emergencies to reach more people<sup>71</sup>
- g. Detailed information and communication needs assessments should be carried out, over time, to ensure a better match between the kind of information people want and the information that agencies are providing, as well as to better understand people's preferences for communication channels.

**Who Should Do This:** All agencies

### 3. Strengthen Agencies' Communication Efforts to Reach All Population Groups

Communicating with communities initiatives need to understand, and take account of, barriers to information that affect certain groups

**Different population groups have variable access to information, as well as different information needs. This needs to be taken into account in the design of communicating with communities activities.**

**In Nepal,** CwC activities need to take account of the cultural, linguistic and physical barriers that affect how well-informed different groups are in order to determine appropriate action, in particular, ensuring that:

- i. marginalised groups (indigenous groups as well as dalit communities) are well-informed and not excluded in efforts to communicate and engage with the affected population;
- ii. the elderly are adequately supported and informed;
- iii. there are more conscious efforts to reach women, who by default have less access to information sources than men, eg, working through their existing social networks;
- iv. where language is a barrier, eg, for women and the elderly, involve local professionals such as social workers and health workers to communicate and share information.

**Who Should Do This:** All humanitarian responders

<sup>69</sup> This recommendation also came out of research on AAP in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan. See Buchanan-Smith et al (2015).

<sup>70</sup> As recommended in the CDAC Network's submission to the World Humanitarian Summit.

<sup>71</sup> If scaled up, they could be a first step to developing a more systemic approach to 'listening', a need identified after the Haiti earthquake (Wall and Chéry, 2010: 6).

## 4. Improve Monitoring, Research and Evaluation of Communicating with Communities Activities

There is a need for improved and more rigorous monitoring, research and evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of communicating with communities activities<sup>72</sup>

Innovation and practice in CwC is running ahead of monitoring, research and evaluation, which is needed to establish the effectiveness and impact of different communication activities and approaches. There is a need for more investment in rigorous data collection and analysis, based on consultation with communities, to build a robust body of evidence. Quantitative surveys that reveal 'what' is working well and what is not must be complemented with qualitative studies which help to understand the 'why'.

**In Nepal**, improved monitoring, research and evaluation should focus on:

- a. The use and impact of radio to disseminate information (building on research done by BBC Media Action<sup>73</sup> and others): who are the messages reaching, and what difference are they making?
- b. The impact of CwC in influencing behavior change: what has worked and why?
- c. Complementing quantitative surveys with rigorous, well-designed, resourced and in-depth qualitative approaches that can provide insights into the 'why', especially focusing on areas and groups where dissatisfaction levels with information received are highest. Further disaggregation of quantitative surveys, by different population groups, would help to deepen insights and guide corrective action.
- d. Sharing good practice and learning, with transparency about how data is collected and analysed.

**Who Should Do This:** Humanitarian agencies should work closely with media development agencies to further develop methodologies for monitoring, research and evaluation of CwC

## 5. Recognise and Reinforce the Role of Communicating with Communities in Addressing Psycho-social Needs

The role of communicating with communities in addressing trauma and psycho-social needs should be reinforced and better support psycho-social programming

The findings of this and other studies show the valuable role played by CwC in addressing trauma and meeting psycho-social needs<sup>74</sup>. This needs to be recognised and reinforced.

**In Nepal**, the provision of information to dispel rumours and about how to stay safe played an important role in addressing fear and trauma. This could be reinforced by involving appropriate professionals more pro-actively at local level, for example, training teachers and social workers so that they can be a channel to provide information face-to-face that helps people to feel calm. Links between CwC and psycho-social programming should be strengthened by working with professionals who also provide counseling, both formally and informally.

**Who Should Do This:** Agencies committed to CwC and especially those that seek to address psycho-social needs

<sup>72</sup> The need for greater monitoring and the development of methodologies was originally identified after the Haiti response (ibid).

<sup>73</sup> See Hannides (2015).

<sup>74</sup> See CDAC Network's Haiti Learning Review (2012) and research by BBC Media Action (Hannides, 2015).



## 6. Integrate Communicating with Communities Across Humanitarian Programming

Effective communication with communities needs to become central to the way of working; this will require an organisational and mindset shift so that CwC is better integrated across the emergency response and within agency programming

**CwC needs to be better integrated within programmes, rather than considered an ‘add on’. This is not a technical change but requires a shift in organisational culture which can ultimately strengthen the relationship between humanitarian responders and affected communities, to more effectively support affected people’s decision-making.**

Drawing on **the Nepal experience**, this requires:

### **a. At the humanitarian system level:**

- Strengthening the role of CwC Working Groups and / or common service projects within the cluster system in order to ensure more effective coordination of communicating with communities’ activities
- Ensuring appropriate staff are in place, such as a dedicated CwC technical expert within specific clusters (depending on which are most relevant to the particular crisis<sup>75</sup>).

### **b. At the agency level:**

- Including CwC in the job descriptions of programme staff (the inappropriateness of giving responsibility for CwC to agencies’ external communications officers needs to be reiterated, building on the findings of previous studies as well as this one<sup>76</sup>)
- Investing in the listening skills of programme staff, and incentivising programme staff to spend time listening at community level.

**Who Should Do This:** All agencies

## 7. Promote Partnership and Coordination of Communicating with Communities

There is a need to strengthen coordination of messaging and dissemination between agencies, and to strengthen partnerships between humanitarian agencies and media development agencies

**There is a need for strengthened coordination to develop more common messaging, informed by research and dialogue with affected communities.**

**In addition, closer partnerships between humanitarian agencies and media development agencies, building on the comparative advantages of each, would ultimately strengthen CwC efforts – and support coordination of common messaging.**

**In Nepal**, the CFP and CwC Working Group have played an important coordination role, and the CFP demonstrates the value of a common service approach. However, agencies have still tended to develop and disseminate their own CwC messaging. Strengthened coordination to develop more common messaging should be part of preparedness efforts for future emergencies.

To overcome obstacles of different organisational cultures between humanitarian agencies and media development agencies, partnerships between the two should be developed in advance of a crisis so that processes and procedures that will facilitate a partnership way of working, and ultimately the effectiveness of CwC, are worked through in advance. This should also give consideration to the role of local media.

**Who Should Do This:** Humanitarian agencies and media development organisations, facilitated by the CDAC Network

<sup>75</sup> Learning from the Haiti earthquake response, in which the shelter cluster hired a dedicated communication delegate (Wall and Chéry, 2010).

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, the Typhoon Bopha Learning Review.

## 8. Develop Guidance for Aid Practitioners on Communicating with Communities

Develop a clear typology of CwC approaches, information and channels, and guidance on effective CwC based on the evidence and learning to date. Disseminate widely to field-level workers in national and international organisations

In the first instance this guidance should be developed for earthquake disasters, drawing on the well-documented experiences of the Haiti and Nepal earthquakes. Building on the findings and recommendations from this study, the guidance should provide an overall typology of CwC approaches and channels, and should cover:

- How to match different types of information to different communication channels, distinguishing between general news and information relevant to all affected people, which is more suited to mass communication (eg, radio, TV, social media), and more personally relevant information for affected people that reflects their need for face-to-face engagement and dialogue<sup>77</sup>.
- The importance of greater human interaction and face-to-face communication as part of CwC, through existing social networks and communication channels, reflecting the wealth of evidence that people affected by crisis want this form of engagement and guidance on how to promote more face-to-face communication (drawing on **Recommendations 2 and 6** above).
- The importance of needs assessments underpinning and driving CwC initiatives in order to understand better the information needs and priorities, and preferred and trusted sources of information, for different population groups, supported by ongoing feedback and consultation with affected people and greater investment in monitoring, research and evaluation (drawing on **Recommendation 4** above).
- How communication with communities should be integrated into the broader humanitarian response, and should build upon communication mechanisms that existed before the emergency (drawing on **Recommendation 6** above).

**Who Should Do This:** The CDAC Network<sup>78</sup>

Creative and accessible ways of making this guidance material available should be explored.

<sup>77</sup> The best communication approaches recognise the differences, benefits and limitations of different communication channels and use them to their greatest advantage.

<sup>78</sup> The CDAC Network is currently developing a 'How To Guide to CwC in Sudden Onset Emergencies'. Later in 2016 it will produce one on conflict.

## Acronyms

<b>AAP</b>	Accountability to Affected Populations
<b>BRCS</b>	British Red Cross Society
<b>CAG</b>	Content Advisory Group
<b>CBS</b>	Central Bureau of Statistics
<b>CDAC</b>	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network
<b>CDO</b>	Chief District Officer
<b>CFP</b>	Common Feedback Project
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
<b>CPS</b>	Common Perception Survey
<b>CwC</b>	Communicating with Communities
<b>DART</b>	Disaster Assistance Response Team
<b>DfID</b>	Department for International Development (UK)
<b>DEC</b>	Disasters Emergency Committee (UK)
<b>IMS</b>	International Media Support
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organisation
<b>IOM</b>	International Organisation for Migration
<b>MEAL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
<b>NCV</b>	Noble Compassionate Volunteer Group
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NTC</b>	Nepal Telecom
<b>NRB</b>	Nepal Rastra Bank
<b>NRRC</b>	Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
<b>PRA</b>	Participatory Rural Appraisal
<b>TPO Nepal</b>	Transcultural Psycho-social Organisation
<b>USAID</b>	US Agency for International Development
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VDC</b>	Village Development Committee
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WVI</b>	World Vision International

## Glossary

<b>dalits</b>	refers to a group of people who are treated as untouchables – those belonging to the castes outside the fourfold Hindu Varna system.
<b>tahara</b>	temporary houses constructed out of zinc sheets.
<b>thulo manne</b>	important person (literally 'big' person).

## References

- BBC Media Action (2008) Left in the Dark: the unmet need for information in humanitarian responses, Policy Briefing #2 (October).
- BBC Media Action (2012) 'What do we know about communicating with audiences in Nepal?' <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/i/20150429101101-tknj4>.
- Bennett, L. (2005) 'Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal: Following the Policy Process from Analysis to Action', World Bank. [http://www.ncf.org.np/upload/files/Bennett\\_rev.pdf](http://www.ncf.org.np/upload/files/Bennett_rev.pdf).
- Buchanan-Smith, M., Ong, J.C. & Routley S. (2015) Who's Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response, Plan International, World Vision, IOM and UKAid.
- CBS (2014) National Population and Housing Census 2011 (Village Development Committee/Municipality) Sindhupalchowk', Vol 6, NPHC 2011, Government of Nepal, Nepal. [http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/Population/VDC-Municipality%20in%20detail/23%20Sindhupalchowk\\_VDCLevelReport.pdf](http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/Population/VDC-Municipality%20in%20detail/23%20Sindhupalchowk_VDCLevelReport.pdf).
- CDAC Network (2012) CDAC Haiti Learning Review.
- CDAC Network (2013) Typhoon Bopha Learning Review. Executive Summary.
- CDAC Network (2014) Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review.
- CFP (2015) Frontline Worker Survey. Nepal Round 1. 4-8-2015, for Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project, Accountability Lab, Ground Truth Solutions and Local Interventions Group.
- CFP (2015) Community Survey. Nepal Round 2. 12-9-2015, for Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project, Accountability Lab, Ground Truth Solutions and Local Interventions Group.
- CFP (2015) Community Survey. Nepal Round 3. 13-10-2015, for Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project, Accountability Lab, Ground Truth Solutions and Local Interventions Group.
- CFP (2015) Inter-Agency Common Feedback Reports (published monthly from August-November 2015).
- CwC Working Group (2015) Information and Communications Needs Assessment (September) <http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/inter-agency-common-feedback-project-nepal-earthquake-2015-information-and>.
- Frohardt, M. (Internews, 2015) 'Humanitarian Information in Nepal – from Crisis to Agency' (April) <https://medium.com/local-voices-global-change/humanitarian-information-in-nepal-from-crisis-to-agency-bd234a8287a7>.
- Hachhetu, K. (2003) 'The Question of Inclusion and Exclusion in Nepal. Interface between State and Ethnicity'. Paper presented to the Conference on 'The Agenda of Transformation: Inclusion in Nepali Democracy,' organised by Social Science Baha on 24-26 April, 2003 at Birendra International Convention Centre, Kathmandu <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/midea/pdf/harticle1.pdf>.
- Hannides, T. (2015) 'Humanitarian Broadcasting in Emergencies: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings'. Research Report Issue 07, BBC Media Action (October).
- ICG (2011) 'Nepal's Peace Process: The Endgame Nears'. Asia Briefing No.131 (December).
- Internews & Interdisciplinary Analysts (2014) Nepal Media Survey. <http://www.slideshare.net/madhu272/internewsida-media-survey-findingsnepal-pdf>.

Internews (2015) 'Communicating With Communities. Nepal Earthquake Response'. Qualitative Assessment #2, Chautara, Sindhupalchowk, May 15 to 17.

[http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/NepalAssessment\\_CwC\\_Chautara\\_May2015.pdf](http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/NepalAssessment_CwC_Chautara_May2015.pdf).

OCHA (2015). Nepal Earthquake Humanitarian Response. April to September 2015.

Pradhan, R. (2006) 'Understanding Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion in the Nepalese Context: some preliminary remarks':

[http://www.socialinclusion.org.np/new/files/Understanding\\_Social\\_Inclusion\\_and\\_Exclusion\\_BY\\_Rajendra\\_Pradhan\\_1336541484c29Y.pdf](http://www.socialinclusion.org.np/new/files/Understanding_Social_Inclusion_and_Exclusion_BY_Rajendra_Pradhan_1336541484c29Y.pdf).

Sanderson D., & Ramalingam, B. (2015). 'Nepal Earthquake Response. Lessons for Operational Agencies' (ALNAP).

Sanderson, D., Rodericks, A., Shresta, N., & Ramalingam, B. (2015). Nepal Earthquake Appeal. Response Review (Disasters Emergency Committee, Humanitarian Coalition, September).

Wall, I. & Chéry, Y.G. (2010) Ann Kite Yo Pale. Let Them Speak. Best Practice and Lessons Learned in Communication with Disaster Affected Communities: Haiti 2010 (BBC World Service Trust, UKAID, Internews Europe).

Withers, L., & Dahal, N. (2015) 'After the Earthquake: Nepal's Children Speak Out: Nepal Children's Earthquake Recovery Consultation'. Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, World Vision International, in collaboration with Government of Nepal Central Child Welfare Board and Government of Nepal Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development.



# Annex 1: Fieldwork Methodology and Overview of Analytical Approach

## Methodology Outline

The qualitative methodology adopted for this study was designed around separate focus group discussions (FGDs) for men, women, youth and marginalised groups (dalits and indigenous groups), simple PRA exercises, and individual interviews with key informants and participants of the FGDs. The objective was to gain greater depth and breadth of information. This use of mixed methods allowed information to be triangulated, and an overall analysis of findings undertaken to identify patterns, document the frequency with which issues were raised, and explore specific details through one-on-one discussions.

The FGDs comprised four main areas of questioning and were delivered through three PRA exercises, which are detailed in Table 1 below. These permitted an overview of the groups' views on each of the areas, and allowed detailed exploration of responses. The question areas were developed from the hypothesis that this study set out to test and the nine associated questions – as set out in Section 1.

The questions were developed collectively with the research team, along with guidelines and formats for recording the findings. The approach was field-tested and adjusted by the team in Kathmandu over a period of two days. A further outline of the interview format was developed for the interviews, although space was given for questions to evolve organically during the interviews. The findings from the PRA exercises were documented and analysed. Rather than collecting quantitative data per se, the aim of the PRA exercises was primarily to allow a deeper exploration of participants' responses, collectively and individually, to identify patterns in terms of commonalities in responses between groups and the frequency with which issues were raised. The PRA approach encouraged relaxed debate among the group, as well as fun in placing bright smiley stickers that encouraged participation and engagement.

**Photo 1:** Smiley face stickers being counted and given out Boudha Camp. Photo: Sarah Routley



**Table 1: Questions, discussion topics and associated PRA exercises**

Key Question	Discussion Topic	PRA exercise discussion
<b>Sources of Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The way in which information was received in the community</li> <li>• Who and where the information was received from</li> <li>• Any barriers to information</li> <li>• How information was clarified, questions asked, how was 2-way communication facilitated, and how and to what extent could providers be contacted</li> <li>• How information was initially received after the earthquakes, and the most important source initially</li> </ul>	<p>Most common sources</p> <p>Source preferences</p> <p>Most accurate sources</p> <p>Most trusted sources</p>
<b>Information needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main information needs immediately after the earthquakes and 'now' (seven months later)</li> </ul>	<p>The main information that was needed immediately after the earthquakes</p> <p>The main information needs 'now' (seven months later)</p>
<b>Information received</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main information received immediately after the earthquake and 'now' (seven months later)</li> <li>• The main gaps and most commonly provided information</li> <li>• What information was received from NGOs and the government</li> <li>• Rumours, or any confusing information, discrepancies and inconsistencies in information</li> <li>• Suggested improvements for information provision</li> <li>• The overall timeliness of information</li> <li>• How information was shared within communities and the role of face-to-face communication; the role of local authorities, the VDC, community members</li> </ul>	<p>The main information received immediately after the earthquake</p> <p>The main information being received 'now' (seven months later)</p> <p>The main gaps immediately and 'now' (seven months later)</p>
<b>How information helped</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ways in which information helped</li> <li>• The negative effects of information, the impact of rumours, and information that was not helpful</li> <li>• How information and its provision could have been improved, led to more changes</li> <li>• What prevented people receiving and using information</li> </ul>	<p>The main ways information helped, and the positive and negative impact of information in the community, and on families</p>

A total of 299 affected people were consulted, which included 85 men and 85 women, 66 youth, 30 representatives of marginalised groups, 25 school children and 8 teachers.

In total, 51 individual interviews were conducted with community members, health workers, social mobilisers, teachers, members of women and WASH committees, shop keepers, social workers, journalists and NGO staff, and with elected government representatives, including Ward Coordinators.

FGD and PRA exercises were conducted with a total of 248 participants. These comprised 17 groups of men, women, youth and marginalised groups across five locations. Two separate FGDs were conducted with 25 children and 8 teachers at a high school in one location. Participants were selected by independent contacts, by NGO staff and by people volunteering.

### **PRA exercise 1 and discussions on 'How information was received; the most common sources, preferred, most accurate and most trusted'**

A facilitated discussion was conducted which explored how participants received information (see Table 1 for question details). Information was described as: 'information about the help that was available; what to do during aftershocks; about health/staying healthy; protecting your family; coping with trauma; how to contact help; and about what help or aid was available'.

Participants discussed who they received information from, and how they received it. The most common ways of receiving information after the earthquakes was discussed in addition to how this changed over time. The role of government, NGOs and local community members in the provision of information was also discussed. Participants' preferences for how they received information, why it was more/or less understandable or confusing, and whether messages were consistent, were explored. Participants were asked what information they perceived to be the most accurate, and why, and which information they trusted the most, and why. Barriers to receiving information and the options for two-way communication with NGOs and government was discussed, in addition to which aid providers could be contacted for further information and how they could be contacted.

A simple PRA exercise was carried out in which participants were asked collectively to list all the ways in which they had received information after the earthquakes on a flip chart (by radio, through face-to-face conversations, from TV, etc.). They were then given smiley face stickers and for each entry on the list, each person was asked to indicate the following:

- the most common way in which they received information
- the preferred way of receiving information
- the most accurate source of information, and why
- the most trusted source of information, and why

During this exercise, a total of 637 responses to the four main questions were documented and discussed. The results were then analysed in order to make comparisons between groups, to identify patterns, and to record the most frequently raised issues.

**Photo 2:** PRA exercise 1 with women at Boudha camp. Photo: Sarah Routley



## The main findings and analysis

During the FGDs the number of times each communication channel was mentioned as the most common, preferred, trusted and accurate was recorded (an extract of the findings is provided in Table 2). For example, mobile phone was considered to be the most common form of communication and the most common source of information in seven of the 17 FGDs. This was closely followed by face-to-face and radio, which were both mentioned in six FGDs as the most common. The groups were not limited to one response, and consensus from the group was not sought. Instead, the issue of why a particular answer had been given, why some people disagreed or agreed, was discussed and recorded. This allowed a deeper exploration of why people felt the sources were important to them.

**Table 2: The number of FGD in which the sources were raised as the most common, preferred, accurate and trusted in PRA exercises**

Overall combined responses (Women, Men, Young)						
	Face to face	TV	Radio	Mobile	Internet	Facebook
<b>Common</b>	6	1	6	7		1
<b>Preferred</b>	7	5	3	4		1
<b>Accurate</b>	7	4	7	1	1	
<b>Trusted</b>	9	3	5	2		

Note: one FGD might have listed more than one source as the most common

**Table 3: The most common, preferred, accurate and trusted form of communication for all the FGDs from the PRA exercises**

Summary of PRA finding topic 1	
<b>Common</b>	Mobile then Face to face, Radio
<b>Preferred</b>	Face to face
<b>Accurate</b>	Face to face and Radio
<b>Trusted</b>	Face to face

The most common types of face-to-face communication were interactions with neighbours, the VDC Secretary, family and friends, and members of the community who travelled and brought back information. Mobile phones were said to be used for calls, text messages, social media, access to the Internet and to access radio. The overall analysis was informed by this information, the transcripts of the interviews and by the documentation of the discussions that took place in the FGDs.

PRA exercise 2 and 3 and discussion of information needed and received over time

Facilitated discussions were held to determine the type of information was most needed immediately after the earthquakes, and the information most needed at the time of the research. Secondly, the information that was received immediately after the earthquakes and at the time of the research was discussed. A PRA exercise was conducted and a timeline was prepared and participants were asked to express in their own words what information they had most needed and received most often (no list of type of information was provided; participants used their own words), both immediately after the earthquakes and at the time the research was conducted.

- Priority information needs immediately after the earthquakes
- Priority information needs 'now' (seven months later)
- The most frequently-received information immediately after the earthquakes
- The most frequently-received information at the time of the research (seven months later)

The responses and detailed examples were then recorded and grouped under different categories as shown in Table 4 below.

Each time a particular type of information was mentioned as being required or received, it was recorded on the table against each of the different information categories. This was done in each of the 17 FGDs. The information needed was indicated as an 'X' on the table, and information received was indicated as a red 'X'. A total of 262 responses were recorded. The responses were analysed for the two time periods (immediately after the earthquake and at the time the research was conducted seven months later) and two tables were created (although only one is included for illustrative purposes). It was noted in some of the FGDs that the information required was also received, hence both a black 'X' and a red 'X' appear. Information that was received in a location but which was not mentioned by the group as a priority need was not assumed to have been 'not needed', rather the findings only indicate that it was not considered to have been a priority by the FGD.



**Photo 3:** PRA exercise in the Kathmandu valley. Photo: Sarah Routley



**Table 4: Main information needs and information received immediately after the earthquake as documented during the PRA exercises**

Immediately		Sangachowk				Khokana			Boudha Camp			Phulpinkot				Baruwa		
		Men	Women	Youth	Lower cast	Men	Women	Youth	Men	Women	Youth	Men	Women	Youth	Lower cast	Men	Women	Youth
Safety of friend/family (rescue)						XX	X											
Protection / preparedness	For future EQ/ aftershocks, quick run bags, rescue nos, risk of damaged buildings/ landslides, hide	XX	X		X		X	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	X	XX	XX	X	XX	X
WASH	Water/sanitation messages, use of purifiers, access to clean water	X		X	X	XX	X	XX	X	X		X	X	X		XX	X	XX
Shelter	How to build resistant housing, temporary, materials	X	X	X	X		X					X	X	X	X			XX
Food-access	Access, distributions			X			X					X	X	X		X		
Facts about EQ	Scientific facts of EQ (predictions/rumours busting)	XX	X	X		X			X	X	X			XX		X	X	
News	From other	X	X				X	X	XX	X	X		XX			X		
Health	Access-medicine (and use), treatment of injured, rescue of dead, health training, nutrition	XX	X	XX	X			X				X	X	X		X	X	
Psych-social	Relieving fear/safety, access to counselling/ messaging	XX	XX		X		X	X				X	X			X		
Protection	Trafficking/protection women/girls/safety/ keeping children close		X	X	X				X	X	X		X					
Education	Re-opening of schools	X											X					
Relief-general	Access to other relief, timing of distributions, entitlements (including assessments)	X	XX	X	XX			X	X	X	XX	X	X		XX	X	X	
Government plans	Entitlements, access to grants, information on distributions		XX	X		X		X		X	X				XX	X		
Security	Robberies, risks of black market, role of army						X						X	X				

**x = Information received**  
**x = Information needed**

For example, in Khokana men said they wanted WASH information immediately after the earthquake and that they received this type of information. They also said they wanted scientific facts about the earthquake, which they said they did not receive. The information received is summarised in Table 5, and some of the categories were grouped for the purposes of analysis.

Table 5 shows the overall number of FGDs in which the information type was said to be have been required or received. For example, immediately after the earthquakes, six FGDs indicated that WASH information was required, and 12 FGDs said it had been received. This information was used in conjunction with the transcripts of the interviews and of the discussions that took place in each of the FGDs to develop the overall analysis.

**Table 5: Information needs and information immediately after the earthquakes from the PRA exercise**

		Number of FGDs in which this information was raised as a main information need	Number of FGDs in which this information was stated as being received
<b>Preparedness and earthquake safety</b>	For future EQ/aftershocks, quick run bags, rescue nos, risk of damaged buildings/landslides, hide	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>WASH</b>	Water/sanitation messages, use of purifiers, access to clean water	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Shelter</b>	How to build resistant housing, temporary, materials	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Food</b>	Access, distributions	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Facts about earthquakes</b>	Scientific facts of EQ (predictions/ rumours busting)	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>News</b>	From other areas, of causalities, damage, safety of family and friends	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Health</b>	Access-medicine (and use), treatment of injured, rescue of dead, health training, nutrition	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Psych-social</b>	Relieving fear/safety, access to counselling/ messaging	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Protection</b>	Trafficking/protection women/girls/safety/ keeping children close		<b>7</b>
<b>Education</b>	Re-opening of schools	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Relief-general</b>	Access to other relief, timing of distributions, entitlements (including assessments)	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Relief - government</b>	Entitlements, access to grants, information on distributions	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Security</b>	Robberies, risks of black market, role of army	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

Note: The numbers represent the number of FGDs in which it was mentioned, with figures in red highlighting the highest figures for analysis

The main information requirements both immediately after the earthquakes and at the time that the research was conducted (seven months later) are summarised in Table 6.

**Table 6: Main Information requirements immediately after the earthquakes and at the time the research was conducted, from PRA exercises**

<b>Main information needs</b>	
<b>Immediately after the earthquakes</b>	<b>At the time of the research, seven months later</b>
<b>Preparedness messages relating to aftershocks and how to survive</b>	<b>Government support: access to grants, information, entitlement and support plans</b>
<b>WASH: messages relating to water and sanitation and access to clean water</b>	<b>Relief: access to supplies for winter (clothes, blankets), training, income generation, agricultural support</b>
<b>Shelter: temporary housing, access to building materials, and building earthquake-resistant housing</b>	<b>WASH: improved sanitation and access to latrines</b>
<b>Health: access to medicines, rescue, and treatment of injuries, nutrition advice and health training</b>	<b>Education: access to education, re-opening of schools and current policies for support</b>
<b>Relief: access to relief, timings of distributions, entitlements</b>	<b>Shelter: reconstruction and entitlements</b>
<b>Government support: access to grants, information distribution and entitlements</b>	
<b>Facts about the earthquakes</b>	
<b>Psycho-social support</b>	

#### **PRA exercise 4 and discussions about ‘How information helped’**

The impact of information was explored by facilitating discussions about how information had helped community members after the earthquakes. A PRA exercise was carried out in which participants were asked in what ways information had helped them and their families. The facilitator introduced information as: ‘information about the help that was available; what to do in aftershocks; about health/staying healthy; protecting your family; coping with trauma; how to access help; and about what help or aid was available’. Some examples were given of how information could have helped, and prompting questions were asked when these were required to focus the discussion. For example, ‘Did information give new knowledge? Make you feeler safer/calmer? Prepare you for future earthquake/aftershock? Or dispel rumours?’ No list was provided to the participants and instead the facilitator drew up a list on a flip chart using the participants’ suggestions. Participants were then asked to indicate the main way the information had helped them and their family.

#### **Findings**

A total of 172 responses were received from 215 participants in the PRA (some of the participants did not respond or express a view). Participants were asked to indicate one response to, ‘The most important way that information had helped them,’ by placing a sticker on the chart or telling the facilitator so their response could be recorded. The exercise was used as an opportunity to further explore in ways the information had helped and why it had helped. The findings were categorised for analysis as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Summary of how information helped, from PRA exercises**

<b>How information helped</b>	<b>Details and examples mentioned</b>	
<b>New knowledge related to earthquakes</b>	<b>Facts about earthquakes, safety, protection, and resistant housing</b>	<b>31</b>
	<b>Future preparedness for earthquakes/aftershocks</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>New knowledge about health and sanitation</b>	<b>Health/sanitation messages</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Psycho-social related benefits</b>	<b>Feeling safer, calmer</b>	<b>34</b>
	<b>Dispelling rumours</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Social cohesion</b>	<b>The importance of living in harmony and working together</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Access to relief</b>	<b>Access to aid agencies and relief</b>	<b>49</b>
	<b>Access to government and relief</b>	<b>3</b>

The table shows that 14 of the 172 respondents stated that information had helped them prepare for future earthquakes or aftershocks, six people said that it had helped to dispel rumours, and 34 people said that it had helped them to feel safer and calmer. The overall analysis was informed by this information, the transcripts of the interviews and of the documentation of the discussions that took place during the FGDs.