

NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015

REVIEW OF SURGE PRACTICES



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FOR THE START NETWORK TRANSFORMING SURGE CAPACITY PROJECT

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About the CHS Alliance: The CHS Alliance is a technical partner on the Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The CHS Alliance improves the effectiveness and impact of assistance to crisis-affected and vulnerable people, by working with humanitarian and development actors on quality, accountability and people management initiatives. Formed in 2015 by the merger of HAP International and People In Aid, the Alliance brings together more than two decades of experience supporting the sector in applying standards and good practices.

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Executive summary

This report presents the results of the first tracking mechanism of the humanitarian surge response to the Nepal earthquake (2015) as part of the Start Network Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The aim of the mechanism is to track changes to surge practices by examining instances of surge deployment by the 11 operational consortium members ("agencies") in the course of the project. Members of the project's research team, Lois Austin, Sarah Grosso and Glenn O'Neil, compiled this report, with the support of the consortium agencies. The report draws on information derived from desk research, interviews with six people from agencies and an online survey of the 11 agencies. The mechanism foresaw that, for each instance tracked, a rapid review would be carried out focusing on the agencies' responses. In this regard, the report does not aim to cover the full scope of the response to the Nepal earthquake.

KEY FINDINGS

Context

The surge response was shaped by the severity of the disaster, combined with poverty, poor infrastructure and a difficult policy environment. The earthquake affected one fifth of the population, and humanitarian aid needed to reach both the densely populated areas around the capital and isolated communities in remote, mountainous locations.

Deployment and response

National and regional staff played a key role in the surge response. Citizens, local businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were the first to respond, and were later largely replaced by international mechanisms and actors. Internal rosters and standing teams helped mobilise staff for the Nepal response rapidly, with eight out of 11 agencies deploying within 24 hours. The approach to surge varied between agencies; some had a minimal international presence and worked closely with local partners, while others deployed their own teams. National staff played a key role, despite being affected by the disaster; additional staff were required to ensure that existing programmes continued during the emergency. Regional staff also played a central role owing to their linguistic and cultural awareness and, in many cases, existing relationships with local staff. Neighbouring offices often launched an ad hoc response rather than arriving via official surge mechanisms. Regional rosters allowed for team building and increased efficiency on the ground.

Agencies were most active in management and coordination, communications, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and logistics. Shelter was central to the surge response and was one of the priority needs. However, only half of the agencies were active in shelter and not all had staff and experience in this sector. Expenditure on the surge response in 2015 for the agencies was an average of some USD \$6,500,000. The materials and equipment most frequently used by agencies were WASH stocks, vehicles and transport and non-food stock.

Collaboration

Collaboration among surge actors was shaped by the nature of the disaster and the government's requirement for international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to work through local partners. A high proportion (70%) of agencies worked mainly in collaboration with others, ranging from local partners, village development committees, government authorities and other INGOs. Many agencies also participated in the United Nations (UN)-led cluster system and with national disaster mechanisms.

Challenges

The first key challenge highlighted was resource management. Difficulties were identified in finding expert staff (including for procurement, shelter and logistics) and qualified Nepali staff. The second major challenge concerned policies and systems. Difficulties in procurement resulted from a lack of infrastructure and changing government import policies, in addition to further policy challenges relating to the government's coordination of the humanitarian response. Ensuring inclusivity in the response, especially regarding the participation of local NGOs and women's particular needs, was a further challenge.

BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Best practices, lessons learned and innovations were identified in the fields of information management, humanitarian communication, collaboration, materials and staff set-up. Recommendations included:

Deployment and response

- Agencies should develop their surge capacities in communication, fundraising and cash programming;
- Agencies should consider further collaboration on supplies and procurement;
- Agencies should address further the needs of marginalised groups;
- Humanitarian actors and donors should work together on improving national policies and regulations for disaster response;



Staff and set-up

- Agencies are encouraged to explore ways of harnessing regional and neighbouring surge response;
- Agencies should strengthen the emergency preparedness of their existing programme staff;
- Agencies need to consider the possibility of devolving further surge decision-making to the regional and local levels;

Communication and technology

- Humanitarian actors are encouraged to explore the use of social media and mobile phones (for both communication and data collection) in the surge response;

Collaboration

- Agencies should further support the creation of a regional roster of surge staff across agencies, one that includes local organisations as well as INGOs.

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1. Introduction

This report presents the results of the first tracking mechanism of the humanitarian surge response to the Nepal earthquake (2015) as part of the Start Network Transforming Surge Capacity Project.

The aim of the mechanism is to track changes to surge practices by examining instances of surge deployment by the 11 operational consortium members ("agencies") in the course of the project.¹ The report draws on information derived from desk research, interviews and an online survey of the 11 agencies.

This report focuses on the surge response of these 11 agencies to the Nepal earthquake while making reference to other key surge actors, such as first responders, civil society, governments, the UN and the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (RCRC). The mechanism foresaw that, for each instance tracked, a rapid review would be carried out focusing on the agencies' responses. In this regard, the report does not aim to cover the full scope of the response to the Nepal earthquake.

2. Methodology

The tracking mechanism was carried out between February and March 2016, combining three data collection methods. Desk research was carried out to locate and analyse the relevant documentation for the Nepal earthquake. An online survey was created and distributed to the 11 agencies at the global (headquarters) level. Ten agencies responded to the survey.² In addition, to supplement these research tools, the consultants carried out interviews with six individuals from the agencies (see annex), in particular senior staff deployed or responsible for the Nepal response.

3. Context

3.1. The disaster

On 25 April 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Nepal, 77km north-west of Kathmandu, flattening large parts of the capital and causing devastation across the nation. The most powerful earthquake to hit the country in 80 years was followed by strong aftershocks causing extensive damage, and a second earthquake struck on 12 May amidst the ongoing relief efforts. The UN declared the disaster a 'Level 3 emergency', the most severe kind of emergency.³

Overall the disaster affected 5.6 million people, one fifth of the country's population (27.6 million), 2.8 million of whom were displaced. More than 8,500 people were killed and 17,600 were injured. The earthquake destroyed or damaged over 473,000 houses, leaving many people homeless.⁴ According to Plan International, up to 90% of the schools and clinics in some districts were also damaged or destroyed. Over 1 million people were in need of food assistance. The worst-hit areas were thought to be the most densely populated Kathmandu valley and the Sindhupalchok district. The urgency of the relief effort, in particular the need for shelter and health services, was accentuated by an impending monsoon season that was expected to commence in June 2015.⁵

¹ The 11 operational agencies are: Action Against Hunger, ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, International Medical Corps, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid, Plan International, Save the Children UK, Tearfund.

² Although active in the Nepal earthquake, Muslim Aid did not respond to the survey. The survey responses of Save the Children UK represent their surge activities and not those of the total Save the Children network.

³ <http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/earthquake-nepal>; Christian Aid, Nepal Earthquake: Humanitarian Briefing Paper, May 2015.

⁴ <http://www.undispatch.com/nepal-earthquake-facts-and-figures/>

⁵ <http://www.plan-uk.org/news/news-and-features/nepal-earthquake-infographic> <http://www.undispatch.com/nepal-earthquake-facts-and-figures/>; Christian Aid.

3.2. The context

Nepal is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, rated 28 out of 199 countries for multi-hazard risk, given its location between two tectonic plates. Over the last decade, powerful floods and landslides have killed over 1,300 people and destroyed homes and crops. The 2015 earthquakes have made it increasingly vulnerable to further natural disasters.⁶ The Kathmandu valley, where the earthquake struck, is particularly vulnerable following recent waves of rural-to-urban migration and a rapid boost in population. Nepal has also been identified as one of the countries most vulnerable to the impact of climate change.⁷

Being one of the world's poorest countries further exacerbates Nepal's vulnerability to natural disasters. More than three quarters of the population survive on the equivalent of £1.50 per day and, even before the disaster, over a third of children in Nepal were living below the poverty line.⁸

This poverty impacts disaster preparedness as, for example, many people build their own homes. In addition, the lack of infrastructure, such as paved roads and a lack of capacity at the only international airport, hampers relief efforts.

The earthquake is expected to have a lasting economic impact and may weaken the economy further by discouraging Nepal's crucial tourist industry, that is centred around Mount Everest, where 17 people died in an avalanche caused by the earthquake.⁹

4. Surge deployment

Following the earthquake, the Nepalese government declared a state of emergency and called for international assistance. The international response has been subject to the criticism that aid delivery was slow at the outset, leaving many people stranded in remote areas for days after the earthquake.¹⁰



CarNetNepal with support from Tearfund, distributing relief materials in Nuwakot, Nepal.

⁶ <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csocd/2016/Kohler-paper-roadtorecovery.pdf>

⁷ Plan.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ <http://time.com/3843436/these-are-the-5-facts-that-explain-nepals-devastating-earthquake/>

¹⁰ Christian Aid.

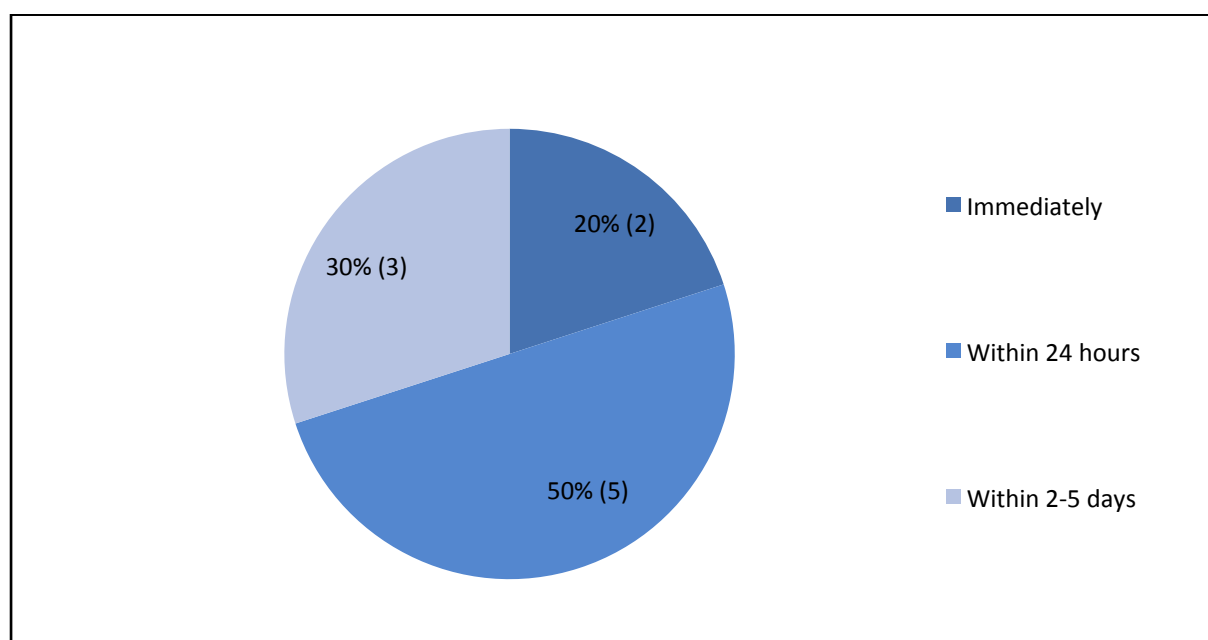
According to the UN, 330 humanitarian agencies responded to the Nepal earthquake, carrying out 2,200 humanitarian activities.¹¹ All 11 agencies that are members of the Transforming Surge Capacity Project were active in responding to the earthquake. Countries also contributed by mobilising disaster response teams; for instance, China sent a 62-member search and rescue team.¹²

First responders were citizens, the military, the police, local businesses and NGOs. These responders were consequently largely replaced by international mechanisms and actors. This had both positive and negative implications: positive in the resources and emergency know-how brought by the international presence; negative in the partial sidelining of Nepalese citizens and organisations in responding in their own communities.

4.1. Speed of response by agencies

According to the survey of the agencies, two agencies deployed immediately (within less than 24 hours), five responded within 24 hours and a further three within two – five days. Many agencies (for instance CARE, Save the Children and ActionAid) were supported by the fact that they had existing offices and staff in Nepal, often for development-related projects; several agencies reported that their surge managers arrived in Nepal within 24 hours. One agency, International Medical Corps (IMC), coincidentally had a senior surge manager in Nepal at the time of the earthquake, who was therefore able to launch the agency's response immediately. Several agencies, such as CARE and IMC were supported by their staff who arrived from India less than 24 hours after the earthquake. Christian Aid deployed its first staff member (an emergency manager for India) within 48 hours to set up its response. Christian Aid's local partner responded within 24 hours, close to the epicentre of the earthquake in Gorkha, taking advantage of ongoing risk reduction projects in areas along Nepal's border with India.

FIGURE 1: SPEED OF DEPLOYMENT FOR AGENCIES – NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015



¹¹ <http://www.undispatch.com/nepal-earthquake-facts-and-figures/>

¹² <http://time.com/3843436/these-are-the-5-facts-that-explain-nepals-devastating-earthquake/>

4.2. Staff and set-up

The agencies demonstrated different approaches in their surge response that reflected their global approach to emergency response. Some agencies (such as ActionAid, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief) had a minimal international presence and worked with local partners, while others deployed their own teams, with expatriates leading their response.

The survey revealed that overall the majority of surge staff responding to the Nepal earthquake were deployed globally. Given the significant role and advantages of regional staff outlined in the documents and by agencies, it is noteworthy that only 17% of all staff deployed came from regional rosters. However, according to the agencies, those deployed from global rosters included a large number from Asia.

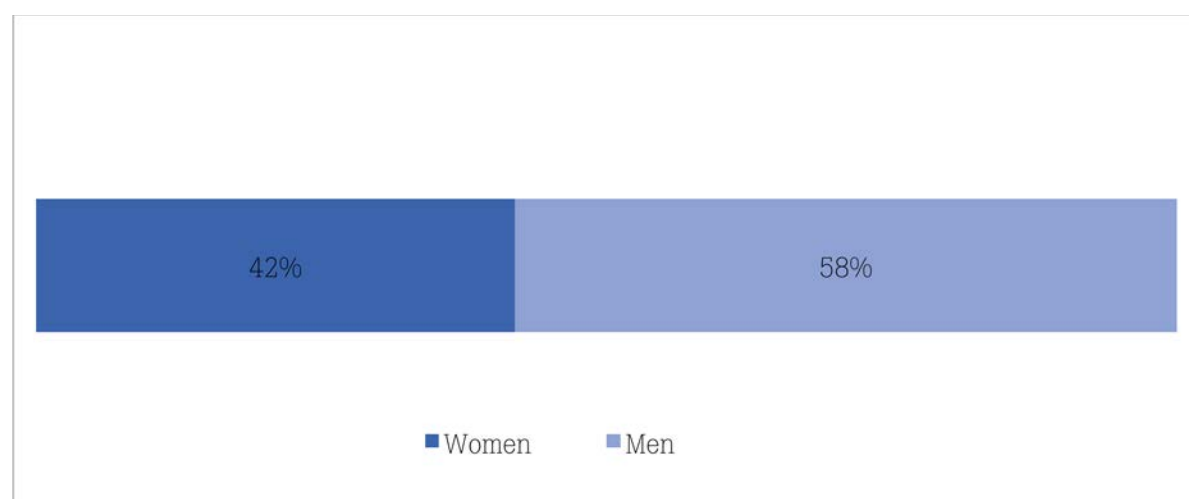
TABLE 1: NUMBER OF SURGE STAFF DEPLOYED BY AGENCIES FOR THE NEPAL EARTHQUAKE (APRIL – DECEMBER 2015)

	Average per agency	Total number
From global staff/rosters:	28	278
From Nepali staff/rosters:	35	207
From regional staff/rosters:	15	91

Role of women

Agencies reported that the majority of staff deployed were male (58%) rather than female (42%) which is similar to agency baseline figures for 2013 – 2014 (55% and 45%). One agency underlined the importance of having women on the rosters, in management positions and recruited in the country.

FIGURE 2: APPROXIMATE PERCENTAGE OF STAFF DEPLOYED BY AGENCIES FOR SURGE RESPONSE BY GENDER – NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015



National Staff

National staff played a key role in the surge response, and the agencies commended them for their readiness to deploy quickly despite being personally affected by the crisis.¹³

Several agencies reported that their current national staff were development-focused and not fully equipped to deal with a major emergency: *“there is an assumption that country staff will take on the emergency response and those roles and this doesn’t necessarily happen”*.¹⁴ Agencies flagged the challenge of ensuring that existing programmes continue during the emergency response. To overcome these challenges, different strategies were adopted: World Vision rapidly recruited 40 new staff in Nepal so that national staff could be seconded to the response team; CARE had a global staff member manage the surge response, which allowed the existing management staff to continue with ongoing projects.¹⁵

Regional and international staff

Regional staff played a central role in this response; IMC’s response was managed regionally as was that of Islamic Relief with most team members deployed from countries of the region (such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan). Agencies underlined the important role played by staff of neighbouring countries, notably India, in terms of *“language and cultural relevance”*.

This contrasts with some of the criticisms leveled at international staff of the wider surge response. Members of World Vision’s senior management shared their reservations about the motivation of these international surge staff, *“concerned that a minority of those deployed into the response came to extend their own experience and also that not all showed respect to local staff”*.¹⁶ The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) reported this failure to engage with the local culture and context as a missed opportunity for capacity-building; *“some [of our] emergency response units operated more or less independently, without making significant efforts to engage with local chapters and lacked an exit strategy that would leave increased capacity behind”*.¹⁷

These concerns about cultural sensitivity were not reported in relation with regionally deployed staff, who had the advantage of an existing knowledge of the region and, in most cases had experience in the country and existing relationships with staff in Nepal. Consequently, the Nepal response confirmed the need for stronger regional surge mechanisms that was raised in the baseline report.¹⁸ Some of the challenges mentioned in terms of deploying regional staff were that some roster mechanisms were still oriented towards a central headquarters model and; the advantages of rapidity, seen in mobilising staff within the country or from neighbouring countries rather than from regional hubs or elsewhere.

Staff by sector

Surge staff were lacking in particular sectors; one major gap identified concerned shelter staff, as reported by the agencies and other actors, such as the IFRC, World Vision and the UN.¹⁹

Length of deployment

Agencies reported that the length of deployment of staff from outside Nepal ranged between 10 and 60 days with an average of 36 days. Concerns were raised that high staff turnover during the response (in INGOs, as well as in the UN) hampered coordination, both with the government and other local partners.²⁰

¹³ World Vision: p. 13; interviews.

¹⁴ Interview, agency member

¹⁵ World Vision: p. 13; Interview, CARE.

¹⁶ Idem

¹⁷ IFRC: p. 20

¹⁸ Idem: p. 16; interviews; Baseline: p. 11

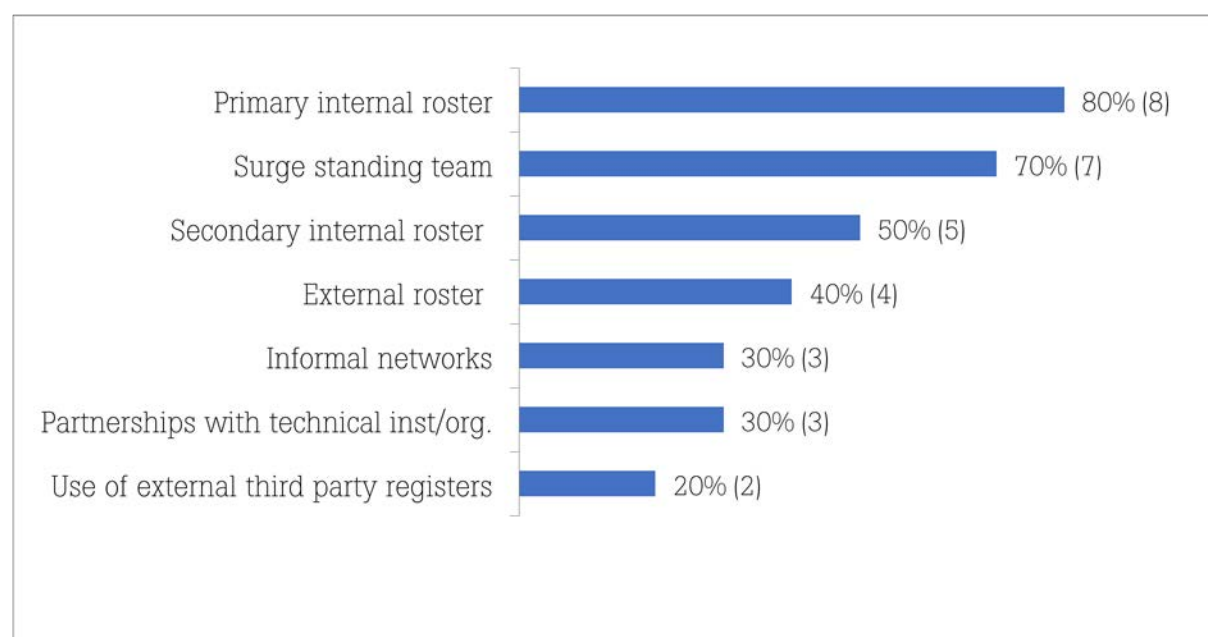
¹⁹ IFRC (2015): p. 19

²⁰ DEC: p. 17; interviews

4.3. Rosters and registers

The existence of rosters and standing teams, in particular internal rosters, proved helpful in rapidly mobilising staff for the Nepal response. The most popular types of rosters used by agencies were primary internal rosters (eight agencies) and surge standing teams (seven agencies). Far fewer (three agencies) relied on informal networks and partnerships with technical institutions or organisations. Islamic Relief, for instance, found that their regional roster enabled them to deploy staff more quickly (within 24 hours) as their line managers had already signed agreements for deployment.

FIGURE 3: TYPES OF ROSTERS/ REGISTERS/ TEAMS ACTIVATED BY AGENCIES - NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015



Rosters also allowed for team building and increased efficiency on the ground. Islamic Relief had recently introduced a regional roster. Their regional team had been assembled in the Philippines a few months before the Nepal earthquake:

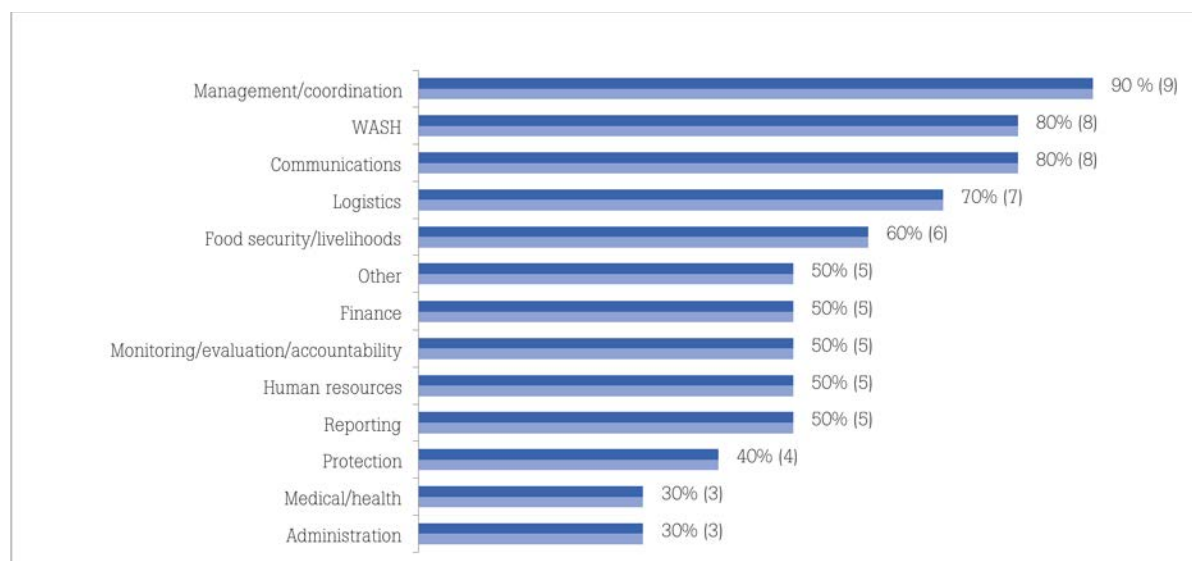
*"The people that were deployed all knew each other and it took no time for them to get going. This was best practice ... team building cannot be done in crisis time – it has to be in peace time."*²¹

4.4. Sectoral approaches

The urgent need for shelter was central to the surge response and was one of the priority needs across all communities; even where homes were still intact, people were reluctant to sleep in them.²² This need was exacerbated by impending severe weather in the monsoon season (June). Half of the agencies reported being active in shelter response but not all had the necessary staff and experience in this sector. Nine agencies responding to the survey were active in management and coordination. Other popular sectors included communications, WASH and logistics.

²¹ Interview, Islamic Relief

²² DEC

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF AGENCIES ACTIVE PER SECTOR IN SURGE RESPONSE – NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015

4.5. Resources

Finance

Pledges to fund the relief effort flooded in rapidly after the disaster.²³ The UN and humanitarian organisations estimated that USD 432 million would be needed in emergency funds to support the relief effort. To date, only USD 88.2 million has been received. The main donors have been the United Kingdom (USD 31 million), China (USD 22 million), Norway (USD 19 million) and the United States (USD 15 million).²⁴ The UN emergency fund provided USD 15 million in funding.²⁵

The IFRC approved a Disaster Response Emergency Fund of CHF 500,000 immediately; they also launched an emergency appeal for CHF 33.4 million 48 hours later (later revised to CHF 84.9 million). This appeal led to total hard pledges of CHF 44,616,939 (representing a coverage of 57%).²⁶

According to the survey of consortium agencies, expenditure in 2015 for the agencies on the Nepal response ranged between USD \$900,000 and USD \$25,000,000 with an average of some USD \$6,500,000. This is based on responses from six agencies; not all agencies could provide total expenditure figures owing to the complexities of calculating such costs and the agencies' federation-based structures. Agencies in general reported that their responses were well funded.

Materials and equipment

The materials and equipment (imported and locally procured) most frequently used by agencies were WASH stocks (seven agencies), vehicles and transport equipment and non-food stock (six agencies):

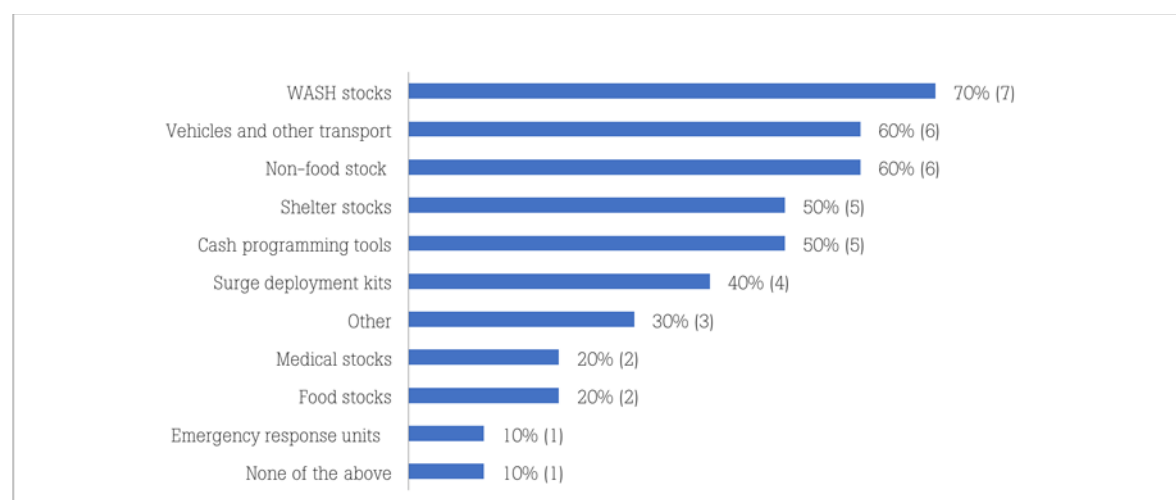
²³ <http://time.com/3843436/these-are-the-5-facts-that-explain-nepals-devastating-earthquake/>

²⁴ The figure for the US would be US\$47 if contributions to search and rescue operation and relief efforts are included. All figures from: <http://www.undispatch.com/nepal-earthquake-facts-and-figures/>

²⁵ <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/key-facts-about-the-nepal-earthquake/articleshow/47108703.cms>

²⁶ IFRC(2015): 8

FIGURE 5: MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT USED BY AGENCIES IN SURGE RESPONSE – NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015



Although shelter was one of the urgent needs created by the earthquake, obtaining shelter materials was one of the major challenges faced by the agencies (see below).²⁷

Many actors had already pre-positioned goods as part of their disaster-preparedness work in Nepal that could then be mobilised. For example, the British Red Cross had pre-positioned 10,000 family kits (non-food relief items) in strategic locations in the Kathmandu Valley.²⁸



Share and Care/Atmaram Lamichhane: Rapid response relief support to the community of Bhotechaur VDC of Sindhupalchowk District after the earthquake

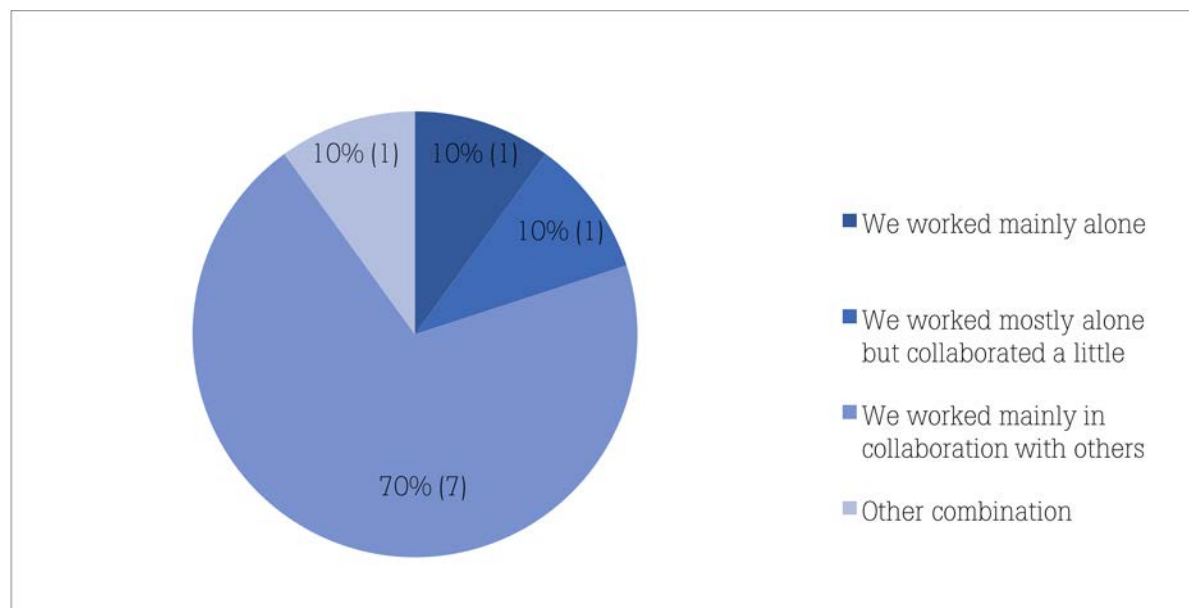
²⁷ The National Planning Commission estimated that over 600,000 temporary shelters would be needed after the earthquake. (SCN: 60)

²⁸ DEC: p. 10, IFRC(2015): p. 11

5. Collaboration

The majority of agencies surveyed worked mainly in collaboration with others (70%), which is double the number of agencies compared to the baseline, where only 36% reported working mainly in collaboration. According to the agencies, this was partially due to the context: responding in Nepal involved working with an array of actors ranging from local partners, village development committees, government authorities and other INGOs.²⁹ Agencies typically needed to have multiple layers of coordination; Action Against Hunger reported coordinating with the clusters, with the INGO forum, with national and district governments and with INGOs and NGOs in the districts where operations were carried out.

FIGURE 6: TYPE OF COLLABORATION BY AGENCIES – NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015



For agencies with no previous presence in Nepal, fostering partnership was key to building trust; as one agency commented: *"when you come from outside and start responding on your own and bringing materials and staff, the issues around trust and confidence can be a thin line."*

One factor that determined the type of surge response was whether an agency had an existing presence in Nepal. Many INGOs who responded were already present in Nepal and were working with partners prior to the earthquake.³⁰ Islamic Relief, for instance, worked with the Lutheran World Federation, as part of their global strategy to work with faith-based organisations, and took on a supportive role in the response.

INGOs were able to build flexibly on these existing relationships with local NGOs to enter districts where they had not previously worked. The UK Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) evaluation commended many organisations (notably CARE, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Islamic Relief, Oxfam and Plan) for their strong links with local partners. In other cases, agencies built new relationships with local or national NGOs. Often, however, the capacities of these local partner NGOs were severely stretched by the mammoth relief effort required, not least because the earthquake also affected them and their staff.³¹

Agencies were also able to build on the substantial preparedness work that had already taken place, including establishing relationships with various partners and the government. Save the Children, for instance, had been working with local partners in order to increase resilience, CARE had existing projects with local partners across the country, while Oxfam had been working in the health sector and WASH. Although Christian Aid was

²⁹ Caritas: p. 7

³⁰ The majority of DEC/ Humanitarian Coalition members

³¹ DEC: p. 19

not previously present in Nepal, it was working on a cross-border project with Practical Action in Nepal and used this connection to launch their initial response.³² However, as reported by several agencies, even when an agency had a presence prior to the disaster, it may not have been working in the affected area. A further challenge concerned the capacity of these local partners to deal with a natural disaster rather than development work, given the different skills and know-how required.

In this context, Tearfund's local partner, the NGO, Rado, believed that the main role that INGOs should play was in capacity-building; they stressed the need to strengthen the capacity of local partners in order to empower local communities and avoid creating dependency. Islamic Relief saw their aim as not merely to subcontract activities to local partners but to build their capacity in the process. This involved mentoring local staff, running a steering committee to manage the process and training local NGO staff on every process to ensure sustainability.

5.1. Internal and inter-agency coordination

Coordination with agencies' regional and neighbouring offices helped the Nepal operations deal with the unprecedented and unforeseen scale of the disaster; CARE India provided materials and staff for CARE's Nepal response; Oxfam India initially managed Oxfam's response in Gorkha; most agencies were supported by staff from their regional hubs. The RCRC also saw strong collaboration between the Nepal Red Cross, the IFRC and partner National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in their response.³³ CAFOD participated in the Caritas Coordination Mechanism that was set up in Nepal to coordinate between Caritas agencies present and identify specific support or surge needs at different stages of the response, and that reportedly functioned well.

5.2. Clusters and networks

Many agencies participated in the UN-led cluster system that was set up following the earthquake, notably participating in the shelter, education and health clusters, both at the district and national levels. Overall, these clusters appear to have had a favourable reaction from the organisations involved, although some have noted the difficulty of including cross-cutting themes, such as gender and coordination *between* clusters.³⁴

The cluster system, together with the UN Humanitarian Country Team, worked closely with the national disaster mechanisms. Disaster-preparedness initiatives had established mechanisms and processes in place in Nepal, from the national to community level, that were seen as beneficial to the response, even if overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster. In general, coordination between government, international and local actors was positive, although there were examples of duplication, overlap and "*competing for space*" as seen in other major disasters.³⁵

The local NGOs remained largely detached from these cluster coordination mechanisms, although more engagement was seen at the district level. Consequently, local NGOs were largely dependent on the INGOs for information, funding and resources. The DEC review of the Nepal response called for more strengthening of local partners and improving their sharing of power.³⁶

Many agencies also reported collaborating with other INGOs. For example, CARE collaborated with Save the Children on education and with Oxfam on gender analysis.³⁷

³² Idem: p. 10

³³ DEC: p. 1 & p. 9; interviews.

³⁴ DEC: p. 18

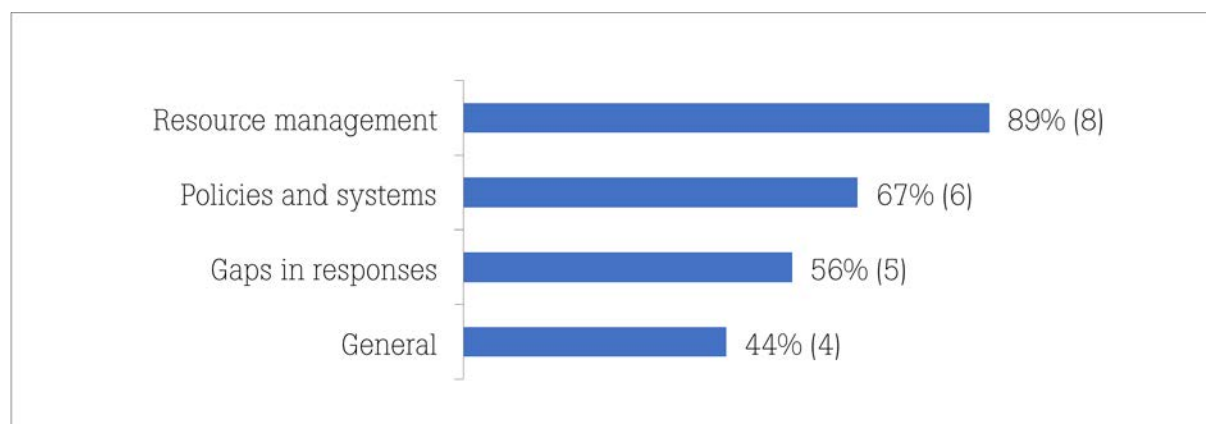
³⁵ The state of surge capacity in the humanitarian sector 2015, Austin, L & O'Neil, G. Transforming Surge Capacity project.

³⁶ Idem: p. 20; interviews.

³⁷ Interview, CARE

6. Challenges

FIGURE 7: MAIN CHALLENGES IN SURGE RESPONSE FOR AGENCIES – NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015



The main challenges reported in the survey of the consortium agencies reflected the predominant issues mentioned in the documentation and interviews: resource management (eight agencies) and policies and systems (six agencies).

6.1. Resource management

Staff

Gaps were identified in the availability of finance, logistics, shelter and procurement staff, in addition to the hiring of qualified Nepali staff. One agency commented that challenges were seen in terms of ensuring a phased handover between first and second waves of surge staff.

6.2. Policies and systems

Support functions

Several agencies reported challenges in their support functions in supporting surge, such as finance, recruitment and procurement. A similar challenge was identified in the surge baseline. Agencies also identified the need to be able to work with local partners quickly and how it was not always feasible to use traditional partnership agreements and/or contracts.

Procurement

The supply of goods and materials was a key challenge, in particular for those working on shelter. As Nepal is landlocked, it is dependent on India for raw materials, especially because local suppliers could not keep up with the colossal demand (such as for corrugated galvanised iron sheets). There were insufficient pre-positioned supplies to match the unforeseeable scale of the disaster and procuring goods locally was difficult, as local markets remained closed for a week. Importing goods was also hampered by a range of internal and external difficulties, including delays at border crossings, changing government policies related to imports (for instance customs delays between the Indian and Nepalese governments) and the low capacity of the only main airport in Kathmandu.³⁸

³⁸ Interviews, World Vision: 1 & 8; Caritas: p. 7.

Government policy

According to agencies and other actors, the government only allowed assessments when an organisation was ready to distribute relief materials. Despite the obstacles this practice entailed, it had some advantages in that agencies would often combine assessments with an immediate response.³⁹ In addition, agencies reported challenges in obtaining registration (for INGOs not previously operational in Nepal) and visas for expatriate staff. Policies in relation to importing materials were also frequently changed and differences were seen in how district governments interpreted national policies. As the IFRC commented *“It became clear early on that normal Nepali customs regulations did not favour a large scale emergency response; ad hoc customs measures hastily developed after the earthquake only led to further confusion and at times unnecessary tension”*.⁴⁰

6.3. General

Scale

The scale of the disaster went beyond what had been imagined or prepared for. For instance, agreements for pre-positioned goods, such as tarpaulins, were not effective as demand was so high.⁴¹ This follows the trend towards the increased demand for surge globally and the stretching of agencies in their response, as identified in the surge baseline study.

Access

Mountainous terrain made distribution difficult and costly (for instance expenses for helicopters services).⁴² Agencies mentioned the lack and high price of helicopters (USD \$15 – 20,000 per day). Staff were also concerned about safety issues, such as after-shocks, landslides and potential flooding.

Building capacity

The large differences in the capacity of local partners exacerbated the situation and led to a call for better integration of capacity building at the local level for surge response.⁴³

Coverage

Seventy-six percent of affected persons surveyed for the Interagency Common Feedback report indicated that their most important needs were not being met in August 2015; their priority needs remained clean



GroundTruth Solutions

³⁹ World Vision: p. 9; IFRC; Interviews; survey results.

⁴⁰ A year on from Nepal's earthquake, Red Cross urges overhaul of disaster laws, Xavier Castellano, IFRC, April 2016. Of note, in Nepal, improving disaster response law has been an ongoing priority of the IFRC and Nepal Red Cross: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-law/news/asia-pacific/nepal-looking-forward-on-disaster-law-69063/>.

⁴¹ IFRC (2015): p. 11

⁴² World Vision: p. 9; Interview, IMC.

⁴³ IFRC: p.17; interviews.

water/sanitation, long -and short-term shelter, livelihood support and healthcare; 55% reported that they were not satisfied with the response of NGOs.⁴⁴

Inclusivity and targeting

A Save the Children report found that “*access to services, programmes and information has varied between different population groups including along lines of gender, ethnicity, physical ability, age and sexual orientation*” and 45% of households surveyed in August 2015 felt that aid was not being provided fairly.⁴⁵ The government’s ‘blanket’ approach to targeting has also shaped the context in which aid organisations operate. Understanding and responding to the needs of the most marginalised groups should be a focus of the recovery phase, according to the Inter Cluster Gender Working Group.⁴⁶

Women

Women, in particular, felt that their specific needs were not being addressed.⁴⁷ The Inter Cluster Gender Working Group found great inconsistency in the level of women’s meaningful participation and leadership following the earthquake. According to the Working Group, strong collaboration with women’s groups could help support the inclusion of women in the relief effort. Of note, only three out of nine clusters used sex -and age-aggregated data in their reporting despite widespread recognition of the importance of such data.⁴⁸

7. Best practices and lessons learned

7.1. Innovation and technology

Information management and communication

Technology was vital in helping overcome information exchange and communication issues, whether through the use of mobile phones to facilitate communication between field staff or through innovations, such as the IFRC’s Surge Information Management System.⁴⁹ Other organisations, including Christian Aid and Oxfam, used mobile phones for data collection, thereby allowing for more rapid programme changes.⁵⁰ However, the DEC review cautioned against the use of high technology; “*the wrong impression can easily be projected by staff entering a community with smartphones on show.*”⁵¹

Humanitarian communication

Multiple media channels (including social media) were rapidly used to inform the public about the crisis and INGO response. Social media also provided a source of information to help agencies understand how the local population was affected and responding to the disaster.⁵²

Innovation

Several innovative approaches were reported:

- The introduction of ‘child-friendly spaces’ by World Vision was viewed positively by government and local partners and as a practical way of helping children and protecting young girls from sexual abuse inside the camps.⁵³

⁴⁴ Interagency Common Feedback Report

⁴⁵ Idem; Save the Children, p. 9

⁴⁶ DEC: p. 6 and p. 16; Inter Cluster Gender Working Group

⁴⁷ DEC p. 12

⁴⁸ Inter Cluster Gender Working Group (point 1)

⁴⁹ DEC: p. 3; World Vision: p. 16; interviews.

⁵⁰ Idem: p. 6 & p. 23

⁵¹ Idem

⁵² World Vision; p. 16, ACAPS; interviews.

⁵³ Inter Cluster Working Group.

- ActionAid was engaging with women's rights and youth mobilisation groups with the longer-term goal of using the disaster response as an opportunity to transform society from an economic and social perspective, particularly where gender is concerned.⁵⁴
- The earthquake provided a context in which gender inequalities could be addressed. For instance, strategies for the prevention of gender-based violence, following the earthquake, have also contributed to an awareness of pre-earthquake inequalities.⁵⁵
- CAFOD's partner, Catholic Relief Services, set up a shelter demo-site in order to pilot different building models and for builders, carpenters and labourers to be trained in safe building techniques.⁵⁶
- Plan International combined mobile health and education teams, adapted to ensure outreach to the most vulnerable households who may not attend group sessions in the community, and to suit remote, hard-to-reach locations.⁵⁷

7.2. Collaboration

Coordination with national and UN structures

Coordination with other actors was mostly positive and supported by existing national mechanisms and the cluster system put in place; efforts were still needed for such systems to be more inclusive (notably with local NGOs).

Regional material and human resources rosters and information

Information about supplies available in the region would be useful in the context of difficulties in procuring materials locally. Equally, agencies expressed an interest in a database of skills and staff available for surge regionally across agencies. It was suggested that this roster or database could cover local organisations as well as INGOs and could focus on longer-term staffing needs that are harder to fulfill.

Devolution of decision-making to the local/regional levels

While many agencies required centralised support for resource mobilisation and staffing, the surge response illustrated the potential of decentralised decision-making at the regional and local levels. This was also credited to the autonomy provided to managers on the ground.

7.3. Materials and equipment

Cash programming

Cash transfers were described as the 'backbone' to the Nepal response and were used by about half of the agencies. Household surveys indicated, however, the need to be sensitive to issues of fairness when dealing with cash distribution.⁵⁸

Procurement

Agencies advocated strengthening the pre-positioning of goods (for instance via memorandums of understanding with local vendors) and pre-negotiation with customs authorities to avoid import difficulties and delays.

⁵⁴ DEC: p. 16

⁵⁵ Inter Cluster Gender Working Group

⁵⁶ DEC: p. 6

⁵⁷ Idem

⁵⁸ Interagency Common Feedback Report. 1,000 of the 1,400 households surveyed raised this issue in August 2015.

7.4. Staff and set-up

Flexible surge staffing

Looking at how agencies responded to the Nepal earthquake, varying combinations of standing teams, rosters, national, neighbouring and regional staff were used, illustrating the need for flexibility in solutions. If a common trait in staff response could be seen it was in capitalising on human resources within the country or close to it.

In-country programme staff

Part of emergency preparedness should involve preparing existing programme in-country staff to be ready to respond outside of their normal role.

New skill sets for staff

The response showed the need for staff with different skill sets: communication and fundraising; cash programming and shelter. Although the latter is not a new skill set it proved to be in short supply. One agency commented that deploying communication and fundraising staff immediately allowed the surge team to focus on responding rather than dealing with the pressures of the media, headquarters and donors. Given the particularities of the Nepal response, it was not certain that agencies would step up their capacities globally in shelter; more so, the other skill sets of communication, fundraising and cash programming were considered more of a priority for future responses.



Tearfund: Rapid Network Nepal on the second day after the earthquake at Southern Lalitpur, Bhattey Dada, Nayagaun

Emergency-response team building in peace time

Following the example of Islamic Relief, regional rosters and teams would clearly benefit from joint training exercises, enabling them to work more effectively together when an emergency arises.

8. Recommendations

The following are key recommendations based on the findings of this report:

8.1. Deployment and response

- Agencies should develop their capacities in communication, fundraising and cash programming for future surge responses.
- Humanitarian actors are encouraged to facilitate procurement by strengthening the pre-positioning of goods, pre-negotiating with customs authorities and exploring the possibility of collaborating at the regional level to share information about supplies available in the region.
- Agencies are encouraged to take further steps in their surge responses to address the needs of the most marginalised groups, including women, through the use of aggregated data, strengthening collaboration with women's groups and recognising women's skills as key for surge responders.
- Humanitarian actors and donors should work together to develop a collective voice to advocate issues of common concern, such as improved national policies and regulations for disaster response (based on international disaster-response laws, rules and principles).⁵⁹

8.2. Staff and set-up

- Agencies are encouraged to explore ways of harnessing regional and neighbouring surge response, including through the creation of regional response teams and by carrying out emergency-response team building training in peacetime.
- Agencies should strengthen the emergency preparedness of their existing programme staff to enable them to work beyond their normal roles when needed.
- Agencies should consider the possibility of devolving further decision-making to the regional and local levels, providing managers with greater autonomy to react on the ground.

8.3. Communication and technology

- Humanitarian actors are encouraged to explore the use of social media and mobile phones in the surge response, for communication and as a source of data collection in order to assess the needs of affected populations.

8.4. Collaboration

- Agencies should further support the creation of a regional roster of surge staff across agencies that include local organisations as well as INGOs.

⁵⁹ Further information: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-law/about-disaster-law/international-disaster-response-laws-rules-and-principles/>.

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List of interviewees and survey respondents

Organisation	Survey response	Interview
Action Against Hunger	✓	
ActionAid International	✓	✓
CAFOD	✓	
CARE International	✓	✓
Christian Aid	✓	✓
IMC	✓	✓
Islamic Relief	✓	✓
Plan International	✓	
Save the Children	✓	
Tearfund	✓	

Persons interview

Organisation	Name	Position
ActionAid International (UK)	Sonya Ruparel Lucy Blown	International Humanitarian Programmes Manager Americas and Operations and Emergencies Systems and Surge Capacity Officer
CARE International (Geneva)	Heather Van Sice	Head, Emergency Programme Quality (Team Leader, Nepal response)
Christian Aid (Iraq)	Yeeshu Shukla	Regional Resilience Officer for South Asia
IMC (Bangkok)	Sean Casey	Senior Global Operations Advisor
Islamic Relief (Islamabad)	Umair Hasan	Regional Humanitarian Manager for Asia