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After-Action Review of Nepal Earthquake Response: Final Report

**Crisis Response Unit
United Nations Development Programme
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Abhijit Bhattacharjee

Abbreviations

AAR	After Action Review
BMS	Bureau of Management Services
BPSP	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
CO	Country Office
CPRTTF	Crisis Prevention & Recovery Thematic Trust Fund
CRU	Crisis Response Unit
DCD	Deputy Country Director
DFAT	Department of Foreign Aid and Trade (Government of Australia)
DP	Development Partners
EDRCR	Emergency Development Responses for Crisis and Recovery
ER	Early Recovery
FA	Flash Appeal
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoN	Government of Nepal
HC/RC	Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator
HQ	Headquarters
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IR	Inception Report
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGCDP	Local Government Capacity Development Programme
MEDEP	Microenterprise Development Programme
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
MOUD	Ministry of Urban Development
NPC	National Planning Commission
NY	New York (UNDP HQ)
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
PDRF	Post-Disaster Recovery Framework
RC	Resident Coordinator
RBAP	Regional Bureau for Asia-Pacific
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
VDC	Village Development Council

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Annexes:

Annex 1: Terms of Reference - After Action Review for Crisis Response to Earthquakes in Nepal, UNDP, 2015

Annex 2: Inception Report – After Action Review of Crisis Response to Earthquakes in Nepal, UNDP, 2015

Annex 3: List of people interviewed/met

Summary of Lessons from the After-Action Review

Crisis Board and surge deployment

1. With staff changes, training, orientation and updating of preparedness/business continuity plan (BCP) need to be undertaken every six months.
2. If staff are seriously affected by a disaster, country offices (CO) need to have discretion to allocate small funds to cover essential expenses for providing basic survival assistance to national staff.
3. The Crisis Board (CB) was able to mobilize a whole-of-UNDP rapid response to the earthquake. The role of Crisis Management Support Team (CMST) was crucial in success of the CB and ensuring that its decisions were followed up at various ends.
4. Although Fast Track Procedure (FTP) was activated, the CO had to revert back to HQ for approvals frequently on recruitment. Additionally, lack of orientation of CO staff in implementing FTP sometimes caused delays.
5. Surge team members, once deployed, need to agree their leave plans with the CO, especially when they are deployed for very short periods (4-6 weeks).

Immediate response

1. While focusing on getting the operations going, a clear articulation of how UNDP would work with the Government, other UN agencies, clusters and development partners (DP) on developing a short- and long-term recovery strategy with a long-term vision is required to in the first few weeks.
2. UNDP's response should be determined by how it positions itself early on in support of the government's overall recovery planning and strategy, and how it engages with various development partners and provides leadership to the early recovery cluster.
3. During and after a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), UNDP needs to ensure that it has good capacity to develop a well-articulated strategy and vision, and communicate these with development partners and government agencies.
4. The surge plan needs to take into account clear analysis of interventions by other key actors, government priorities and donor environment in the country, besides the needs of affected communities.

Programming issues

1. Careful analysis is needed where UNDP can add significant value according to its niche and competence. While UNDP needs to pay attention to its own operations (debris clearance), this should not be allowed to take attention away from supporting the government in developing an overall strategy, on the one hand, and ensuring rehabilitation of functioning public infrastructure and services in the immediate aftermath of a major earthquake, on the other.
2. Promoting innovations and private sector engagement (with UNDP and governments) as a key focus of UNDP in disaster response could position it distinctly from other humanitarian agencies.
3. UNDP's response works best when it is linked to and builds on its ongoing programmes and competence.

4. Dialogue with DPs and governments on financing mechanisms for early recovery and reconstruction needs to start immediately after a disaster and continuously developed during and after PDNA.

Interagency coordination

1. UNDP needs to ensure that it 'firewalls' early recovery cluster role from its own early recovery operations in future.

2. Advocacy needed at IASC level to agree transition mechanism to coordinate recovery after departure of OCHA, especially where national capacity to coordinate international response is weak.

3. UNDP needs to develop, working with local and national institutions (and UN Capital Development Fund), specialized expertise in providing support (inclusive financial infrastructure, market and local economy assessments, cash transfer technology, transparency and assurance mechanisms etc) to cash-based response which is increasingly expanding in post-disaster response.

Resource mobilisation

1. Clear articulation of a medium- and long- term vision is needed to engage with donors early on in the response. Towards this end, deployment of senior communication staff capable of working with programme team to develop clear communication messages for donors is crucial.

Background

1. On 25 April 2015, a devastating earthquake hit Nepal causing severe destruction of lives and property in 14 of the country's 75 districts. This was followed by another severe earthquake on 12 May which further worsened the humanitarian situation. The two earthquakes affected over 5 million people and the death toll was 8,702.¹ The earthquakes destroyed 498,852 houses and 2,656 government buildings, besides partially damaging another 256,697 private houses and 3,622 government buildings.² Additionally, roads, bridges, water supplies, schools, hospitals in the main cities and in rural areas across more than two-third of Nepal's 75 districts suffered severe damages.³
2. The humanitarian consequences from the earthquake triggered a large-scale international humanitarian response under the leadership of the Government of Nepal (GoN). The international humanitarian cluster system was formally activated immediately after the first earthquake by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) of the United Nations.

Introduction

3. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which has an on-going multi-sectoral development programme in the country mobilised in a substantive way to respond to the crisis. UNDP's response was geared toward developing an integrated programmatic and operational plan that both responded to the immediate needs of the crisis. This was intended to be achieved by launching an early recovery response as well as providing leadership to the early recovery (ER) cluster and developing a 'core resilience-based approach to recovery' (TOR, Annex 1). When the earthquakes struck, UNDP at the corporate level had just revised its Crisis Response Strategy that included programme, operations, communications, enhanced deployment mechanism and resource mobilisation, among others. The crisis response strategy, with a global scope, concretely expresses UNDP's commitment to step-up its capacity to be prepared and capable of responding to a crisis in a predictable manner. Nepal crisis was one of the first and very initial testing ground⁴ for the revised crisis response strategy.
4. A few months preceding the earthquake, UNDP had undergone a significant restructuring, with the Crisis Response Unit (CRU) emerging as a new structure to improve the organisation's ability to mount a quick response to crisis while coordinating the corporate response. In line with corporate procedures corresponding to this magnitude of crisis,⁵ UNDP

¹ As of 3 June 2015. Source: <http://data.unhcr.org/nepal>. Over 200 were missing at the time.

² Post Disaster Recovery Framework, Government of Nepal, 2016

³ Terms of Reference, After Action Review for Crisis Response to Earthquakes in Nepal, UNDP, 2015

⁴ The other – prior to Nepal earthquake – was the tropical cyclone Pam in the Pacific

⁵ Nepal earthquake was classified as L2 emergency as per UNDP's crisis response SOP. UNDP has 3 levels of crises depending on several factors: (i) L1 – where the CO has capacity to manage the response with some ad hoc support from HQ; (ii) L2 – where the CO can manage the response only with substantial day-to-day support from the

decided to undertake an after-action review (AAR) to serve as an internal learning exercise to gain useful insights into how an organisation-wide strategy can support the UNDP country office (CO) and key partners in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The objective of AAR was to examine the performance of UNDP with respect to response to the earthquakes in Nepal in first six months, and highlight lessons learned that would help strengthen functioning, performance and efficiency of UNDP's disaster response in future. The focus of the AAR was on application/deployment of tools, processes and resources in the immediate crisis response period governed by a Crisis Board (which was dissolved on 13 October 2015), and draw forward-looking recommendations for the corporate crisis preparedness and response tools in view of their application to future crisis response situations.

5. The AAR was carried out by an independent consultant in September 2016. At the time of this AAR, the CO was also about to undertake its own lessons learning exercise with focus on programmatic issues covering the entire response so far. In a way, the two processes and outcomes draw on each other; this AAR focused on the immediate response period (first six months) while the CO lessons exercise has a wider scope and covers the entire period so far. Detailed methodology used for the AAR is elaborated in the inception report attached as Annex 2. In brief, the key methods used were:
 - Desk review of key documents
 - Key informant interviews and focus group discussions – UNDP staff in New York (NY), Regional Bureau for Asia Pacific (RBAP) and CO
 - UN country team – Resident Coordinator and staff
 - Government of Nepal – key officials who acted as focal points for UNDP on clusters and recovery
 - Selected NGOs active in the early recovery/recovery programmes in Nepal
 - Key donor agencies funding UNDP's programme in Nepal
 - Participation in a CO AAR workshop where CO staff shared their experiences and lessons.

6. All together, 40 individuals were interviewed (details Annex 3) – the breakdown of different stakeholder groups is provided below:

• UNDP Headquarters (including RBAP)	14
• UNDP Nepal	15
• UNCT staff	3
• Government of Nepal Representatives	2
• NGOs in Nepal	3
• Donor agencies funding UNDP (Nepal-based)	3

7. As described in the inception report, the AAR focused on the following five areas to draw lessons from the Nepal response:
 - i. *Crisis response*
 - ii. *Operational response*
 - iii. *Programmatic response*

HQ/RBAP; and (iii) L3 – corporate emergencies which require the attention of the entire organisation due to the scale, complexity, resource requirements and interagency/international dimensions of a crisis.

- iv. *Resource mobilisation*
- v. *Interagency coordination*

Limitations of the AAR

8. This AAR was carried out almost a year after the surge period – which is the focus of this AAR – came to an end. Though care has been taken to ensure that findings are triangulated from several sources, people's perceptions and recollection of events of that period may be coloured by what has transpired in the subsequent period as it is natural for key informants to give primacy to their most recent experiences.

Timeline

25-Apr-15	Gorkha earthquake
27-Apr-15	ER cluster initiated
27-Apr-15	First CB meeting (26-Apr, NY)
29-Apr-15	Flash Appeal launch (US\$415 million)
30-Apr-15	UNDP Surge team starts to arrive
1-May-15	First early recovery cluster meeting
9-May-15	Surge planning team leaves Nepal
12-May-15	2 nd earthquake
12-May-15	UNDP Surge Plan produced (US\$175 million)
15-May-15	PDNA process starts
29-May-15	Revised Flash Appeal launched (US\$ 422 million)
25-Jun-15	PDNA launch and donor conference
13-Aug-15	NRA CEO appointed
25-Aug-15	UNDP Nepal recovery strategy draft
30-Sep-15	Humanitarian Phase close
1-Oct-15	ER cluster final report
11-Oct-15	Change of Government
1-Nov-15	Livelihood Assessment Report

24-Nov-15	Sindupalchowk Livelihood WG
28-Nov-15	Gorkha Review of Humanitarian Response and Strategic Planning for Recovery
1-Dec-15	HCT After Action Review
4-Dec-15	ER Cluster close

Crisis response

Findings

9. At the CO level, UNDP had prepared Business Continuity Plan in 2013 which was not updated after that, and the Plan was not fully activated in the manner envisaged in it. As a number of staff had changed during the intervening period, there was a need for periodic updating and orientation which were not done. As a result, despite being fully aware of the earthquake risks, the CO was not fully prepared. Despite this, at least key operations colleagues were familiar with the roles and responsibilities in post-crisis situation, and minimum essential operational procedures were activated as a result.⁶ In the initial weeks, the CO office premises was not considered safe until the structure was assessed. Most of the national staff were directly or indirectly affected by the earthquake and they expected emergency practical support (tents/temporary accommodation, water, security updates, etc) from UNDP on the lines of what was reportedly provided by other agencies,⁷ but UNDP could not meet these.⁸ It is understood that learning from this, **UNDP CO now has developed a protocol to meet such exigencies so that staff receive a minimum level of immediate support during emergencies.**
10. Immediately after the earthquake, UNDP moved quite fast to take a few major decisions which helped shape the scope and direction of its response:
 - i. Working with CRU, the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) and Regional Bureau for Asia Pacific (RBAP) decided that Nepal crisis would be dealt as a L2 response,⁹ meaning thereby that CO will manage the response with expanded support and mobilisation from New York (NY) and Bangkok Regional Hub (BRH), coordinated through a Crisis Board (CB) chaired by the Deputy Director of RBAP. This was a

⁶ The BCP could not be implemented fully as prescribed in the BCP document. Since Kathmandu valley was not impacted as much as other rural areas, communications (mobile, internet, transport etc) were operational.

⁷ Key informant interviews showed that several other UN agencies and NGOs have a standard practice of allocating small budget for immediate support needs of staff to meet emergency needs.

⁸ Subsequently UNDP did provide one-off monetary compensation up to USD 2,000 for house repair to each staff who lost their home. Option of advance salary for 10 days and emergency leave was also offered.

⁹ UNDP categorises crises at three levels (L1, L2, L3) depending on a combination of factors namely, scale of disaster, urgency, capacity, complexity and reputational risk and this determines how support will be mobilized and response managed at CO, region and HQ level.

- significant decision and was in line with how other agencies – through the leadership of Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) - were dealing with the disaster.
- ii. The first CB meeting was convened within less than 48 hours of the earthquake and Fast Track Procedures (FTP) to facilitate speedy response to the crisis was activated.
 - iii. Decision to deploy two early recovery cluster coordinators and one communications specialist as first responders, and offer secondment of a recovery adviser to the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) – this offer was however not accepted by the RC/HC on the ground that the RCO already had adequate capacity.
 - iv. By day 4, a full complement of surge planning team with senior people knowledgeable about the country was put in place for deployment.
 - v. Immediate release of funds from TRAC 3 and Crisis Prevention and Recovery Thematic Trust Fund (CPRTTF), in addition to reprogrammed resources at the CO level.
 - vi. A surge plan for three to six months was produced fairly rapidly within 2 weeks of the earthquake by the Surge team deployed between 30 April and 9 May.
11. UNDP had a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for crisis response. At the time of the earthquake, the SOP was under revision. The revision was meant to further clarify specific roles and responsibilities of UNDP after the 2014 restructuring, the Regional Hubs and the COs, level of authority for allocation of funds, deployment of first responders and clearly distinguish between the support to be provided in different levels of response (L1, L2, L3). The CB took a decision to deploy a team of first responders from the BRH, with staff who had good knowledge of the country.
12. The CB met at least 8 times during the period 26/27 April and 9 June, with meetings taking place every 3-5 days in the first three weeks. **Staff interviewed felt that in general the CB meetings had the right level of participation and were well chaired, with focus on both decision-making and information sharing.** However, sometimes the CB meetings veered more to meeting the information needs of various parts of the HQ, some of which could have been dealt with on a bi-lateral basis. Each meeting of the CB was preceded by meetings of Crisis Management Support Team (CMST) involving Deputy Country Director (Programme) from the CO and specialists from all relevant UNDP Bureaus (both NY and Bangkok-based) which helped prepare the agenda for CBs. There are generic terms of reference for the CMST and the latter ensured at technical level that support from various bureaus in NY and RBAP was well coordinated, and that CB decisions were acted upon in a timely manner.
13. The CB process, along with the CMST meetings, helped streamline support from the Bureau of Management Services (BMS), Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) and other departments in NY. On 27 April, the BPPS and CRU¹⁰ approved an amount US\$160,000 from TRAC 1.1.3 (sudden crisis response) of which USD 50,000 was earmarked for RC/HC office, and a month later (27 May 2015), BPPS approved another US\$1 million for a recovery programme from the CPRTTF. At the CO level, working with development partners, rapid decisions were taken to release unspent funds from key projects (Local Government Capacity Development Programme) to fast-track response. From the HQ,

¹⁰ TRAC 3 allocations were managed by BPPS and CRU jointly as an interim measure in early 2015 (signed by BPPS). Now these are fully managed by CRU only.

a Fast-Track Procedure (FTP) for dealing with emergency finance, procurement and recruitment was agreed. However, interviews at country level suggest that at times the CO was unable to take full advantage of this due to lack of experience in use of FTP and there were delays which could have been avoided.

14. **The CO noted that the CB process worked smoothly and communication with CRU and RBAP was seamless in supporting early response.** Some participants in CB felt that it was sometimes 'over-engineered' to get participation of as many people as were interested, rather than ensuring a need-to-involve basis. A large participation from the NY end may have drowned the voices of the regional hub who were probably better aware of the ground situation.
15. The CB endorsed candidates for surge deployment. UNDP now has over 400 staff on its surge roster, of which about 250 were trained in crisis response by UNDP. Besides this, UNDP has a roster of consultants and six stand-by partners who provide pro bono services. Before every deployment, a clear TOR was developed by the CO and agreed with the CRU. Each surge team members underwent systematic briefing and debriefing before and after deployment and, in the early weeks, all those deployed were fairly self-sufficient in that they could hit the ground running without much assistance from the CO. The CO together with the RCO developed a briefing package and orientation on country context for all arriving Surge deployment. **At the CO end, the DCD (Programme) was the surge focal point working closely with the CRU, and this worked well as the former had good insights into CO capacity and priorities.** As the surge deployment was at the request of the CO and was made at a pace the latter could manage, scaling up and scaling back did not cause any disruptions.
16. Feedback from internal stakeholders indicate that the surge team and the CO worked well together as most of those deployed in the early weeks have had either direct experience of working in Nepal or the region. The interaction and engagement between the surge team and the CO went smoothly, with joint thinking and planning. **Key informants felt that UNDP did get the overall balance of deployment right in terms of mix of people with national, regional and international experience.** Several surge team members, however, went on leave whilst being on surge for short-time (2-3 months), something which the CO was initially unaware of, though this was agreed by individuals with the CRU before their deployment.

Lessons

- When local staff and families are seriously affected in a disaster, UNDP must try to immediately provide a minimum basic survival assistance (tents, food, water, medicines, assistance with transport, etc) for a few days immediately after a disaster. Ideally this should be a UN System-wide preparedness and a standardised package of assistance (tents, food, water, medicines and other necessary relief items) to all affected UN staff to avoid staff of different UN agencies receiving different assistance packages.
- Preparatory work by the CMST was critical to successful conduct of CB meetings and this should be standardised in all response and participation in CB should be based on an individual's ability to add substantive value to the discussions and ensure follow through of CB decisions.

- CO staff need orientation and training for effective utilisation of FTP.
- Surge deployments ensured that each deployed staff underwent systematic briefing and debriefing before and after deployment and, in the early weeks, all those deployed were fairly self-sufficient in that they could hit the ground running without much assistance from the CO.
- Once deployed, staff need to agree their holiday/leave plans with the CO, as stipulated in the SOP. However, this probably needs reinforcing and clearly communicating to the deployed staff.

Operational response

Findings

17. The SOP followed during the response helped clarify internal division of labour between different parts of the organisation and ensured that the entire organisation mobilised at different levels to support the response and also ensured a rapid surge team deployment. The CB focused on operational issues and to this end, according to all key informants and focus groups, it was very effective. However, by its very nature of being preoccupied with 'here and now' situation, it could not dwell on strategic issues like developing some of the medium to long term vision for recovery, supporting the government in recovery planning and coordination, and positioning UNDP vis-à-vis other major players in its support to an overall national recovery strategy. Interviews with internal stakeholders indicated that preoccupation with 'operations' might have deflected attention away from the need for more strategic thinking in shaping the overall response in early phase. **What was missing in the first few months was a clear articulation of how UNDP would support the GoN in developing an overall recovery strategy and engage with other UN agencies, clusters and development partners (DP) projecting a long-term vision.** The Surge Plan did have an articulation of UNDP's strategy, but it was prepared too soon, when the humanitarian phase was still in progress and could not therefore project much beyond the immediate relief phase.
18. UNDP was able to deploy an experienced and trained cluster coordinator who knew the country. ER cluster was activated by UNDP jointly with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) by day 2 and its first meeting was held immediately thereafter, attracting significant participation from humanitarian agencies. This was significant and recognised that in natural disasters **the gap between relief and recovery phase is not big as affected communities begin their recovery efforts immediately after a disasters, though it may take a few years before full recovery takes place. UNDP also offered the services of a senior recovery adviser to the Resident Coordinator's office which was not taken up by the RC/HC on the ground that the latter already had adequate capacity.**
19. UNDP invested heavily in the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) – as evidenced in the fact that UNDP mobilised over 15 international experts and CO staff for this exercise - and its role in the process is widely acknowledged by all stakeholders. Almost all stakeholders were unanimous in their opinion that **the expertise provided by UNDP was critical for producing a high quality PDNA, and the strong emphasis on vulnerability, gender and social inclusion the PDNA laid came mainly from UNDP.** An examination of

CB minutes¹¹ shows that the former was conscious of this and noted that drawing lessons from Pakistan flood experience, PDNA needed to avoid having a narrow focus on infrastructure alone and incorporate gender, disaster risk reduction and softer issues such as inclusion, livelihood and governance. Besides bringing in a number of experts, UNDP supported the PDNA secretariat and worked closely with the National Planning Commission (NPC).

20. However, after the PDNA was completed, UNDP took a backseat and did not capitalise on it by taking a lead in engaging with development partners and GoN on a long-term strategy. The inability to articulate a clear vision came up in several discussions with internal and external stakeholders – **that UNDP was seen to be trying to compete for ‘humanitarian space’ while its response should be determined by how it positions itself in support of the government’s overall recovery planning and strategy, and how it engages with various development partners.** Interviews with external stakeholders – NGOs and donors, in particular – suggest that, except for support on the PDNA, UNDP only played a peripheral role like many others in engaging with the government and development partners on development of an overall strategy. With hindsight, the CO attributes this gap to absence of an Early Recovery Advisor dedicated to advising UNDP CO team - ER Cluster Coordinator was dedicated to the Cluster and ER Advisor to the RCO. UNDP did deploy recovery coordinators on short missions but they had limitations in providing continuous and coherent support.
21. Some of this lack of follow up initiative could be attributed to political uncertainty surrounding the Constitutional amendment and the blockade at the country’s border with India which created a political crisis and put the entire government machinery in a state of limbo for months in the latter half of the year. All these delayed setting up of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) by about 8-9 months. Besides, the relationship between traditional donors and the GoN which often was perceived as being unpredictable - a very successful pledging conference in June notwithstanding – also contributed to uncertainties over long term recovery financing.
22. UNDP produced a surge recovery plan within two weeks of the disaster – the plan estimated a requirement of US\$175 million for UNDP over a three-year period. A number of internal stakeholders¹² observed that **it was not grounded on reality and did not take into account funding environment in the country and UNDP’s positioning vis-à-vis the humanitarian and development institutions in the country. With hindsight, many felt that the plan had very little by way of analysis of other stakeholders’ response, donor context in the country and government’s focus and capacity.** The surge plan did identify key priorities¹³ but failed to take into account certain key factors in its analysis – donor environment and

¹¹ Minutes of UNDP 7th Crisis Board Meeting on Nepal Response to Earthquake, UNDP, 29 May 2015

¹² The CO was also concerned about the methodology for arriving at such an ambitious surge Plan immediately after the disaster when data on damage and assessments were not available yet.

¹³ It outlined three pillars of intervention: 1) livelihoods restored and economic recovery ensured (in the short term); 2) local governance function restored for effective public services/housing (in the medium term); and 3) national capacities strengthened for recovery planning and DRR –building back better (over the longer term).

appetite,¹⁴ UNDP's credibility with donors,¹⁵ and UNDP's distinctive competence. This was mainly due to the fact that in its rush to launch its response, the plan came too early in the response when immediate relief was still the overriding focus of all agencies.

Lessons

- UNDP succeeded in mobilizing a whole-of-UNDP response and a substantial number of experts for its early response, but failed to develop and communicate a clear vision articulating how UNDP would work with all stakeholders towards medium and long-term recovery.
- UNDP's response should be determined by how it positions itself early on in support of the government's overall recovery planning and strategy, and how it engages with various development partners and provides leadership to the early recovery cluster. While rapid deployments as was done in case of Nepal is appropriate, greater attention was needed in developing and communicating UNDP's strategic positioning.

Programmatic response

Findings

23. It is reported that the CO received a call from NY even before the arrival of the surge team to suggest that debris management will be a priority and the surge team will develop a clear programme for this. The surge team presented the plan to the CO on 12 May where the idea of prioritising private buildings for debris management using cash-for-work approach was outlined. The plan was in line with UNDP's crisis package as elaborated in the SOP (still under development at the time of the earthquake) and focused on: (a) livelihood restoration and economic recovery; (b) restoration of local governance function for effective public services/housing; and (c) strengthening national capacity for recovery planning and disaster risk reduction. The CO went along with the proposal of the surge team as it built on several components of the existing country programme which it was undertaking in partnership with GoN, namely:¹⁶

- Local Governance and Community Development Programme
- Micro-enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP)
- Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Programme (CDRMP)
- Livelihood Recovery for Peace (LRP)
- Strengthening Rule of Law and Human Rights (ROLHR)

¹⁴ This concern was also raised in the 5th CB meeting (Source: Minutes of UNDP 5th Crisis Board Meeting on Nepal Response to Earthquake, UNDP, 13 May 2015)

¹⁵ Prior to the earthquake, during 2013-14, UNDP programme in Nepal have had some bad reviews (for example: mid-term review of CDRMP) and audit which donors were concerned about that led key donors to exercise 'extreme caution' in dealing with funding proposals from UNDP Nepal. The environment, as reported by donors, is gradually changing as they have noted several improvements over the past two years.

¹⁶ UNDP. UNDP SURGE Plan Response to Nepal Earthquake of April 2015, May to October 2015

24. UNDP undertook demolition and debris removal of private houses in 3 village development committees (VDC, or sub-districts) of one district, through linking this with cash for work for affected families. This was too small a scale (3,468 houses)¹⁷ to make any significant difference in the overall national response where nearly half a million houses were totally destroyed, although for the households targeted in remote areas, UNDP's assistance was highly valuable. Moreover, this raised expectation in other districts, and the GoN at the central level did not appreciate this approach, though these may have been agreed at local levels with district and VDC authorities in areas which UNDP targeted. Several donors were critical of the approach taken by UNDP as this was very costly (one UNDP source mentioned a figure of approximately US\$1,000 for each house). The choice to go for private buildings was made at that time considering the need of some of the most-affected households and the understanding that IOM was focusing on public buildings. Subsequently, UNDP changed its focus from private houses to debris clearance for public building (offices, schools, VDC buildings) by October-November and temporary rehabilitation of local government offices.¹⁸ UNDP's support for rehabilitation of local governance structures was slow. Several other agencies (at least two NGOs were named) were much faster in their response on this. **If UNDP had done debris management in relation to public buildings right from the start, public services could have been restored earlier.**
25. **While debris management was a critical issue and UNDP rightly picked this up early on for its focus, most internal and external stakeholders interviewed during the AAR strongly criticised UNDP's approach and suggested that UNDP should have instead, or additionally, focused primarily on public buildings in urban and peri-urban centres to get the government offices re-established quickly enough.** For this, it would have been necessary to hire private contractors and heavy equipment suppliers from neighbouring countries which UNDP could have done. However, as mentioned earlier, UNDP agreed with the IOM that the former would focus on private houses while the latter work in urban areas. International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and WFP (cash for work) did some of the work related to demolition of unsafe public building and their debris clearance, though on a very small scale. UNDP had hired six international¹⁹ and 90 local UNV engineers²⁰ to assist with demolition and debris clearing of private houses – government stakeholders opined that if this huge resource was made available to the government, they could have carried out damage assessment of public buildings in districts and municipalities much faster to pave the ground for rehabilitation of these offices.
26. According to a significant majority of external and internal key informants, UNDP should have supported the GoN and local governments in affected areas with staff/experts to assist

¹⁷ UNDP Nepal Annual Report, UNDP 2015

¹⁸ FGD with district coordinators indicated that in two districts, UNDP started working on prefabricated public building after about 2 months, but elsewhere these were done in October-November.

¹⁹ At least six of the surge deployments in the first couple of months after the earthquake were related to debris management.

²⁰ Subsequently (in the post-surge period), UNDP is reported to have hired 577 skilled engineers over the year for damage assessment and trained 673 masons in seismic resistant construction practices (Source: Post-Earthquake and Early Recovery Interventions by UNDP Nepal, May 2015-April 2016, UNDP, 2016)

in rapid assessments and coordination in a significant way and assisted local authorities in setting up tents and temporary offices right from the start – something UNDP did after 4-6 months. Debris management was certainly a critical need, but the question is whether UNDP focused on the right debris. Although demolition of damaged private houses and clearing of the rubbles in affected communities were highly useful for the beneficiaries, UNDP's capacity is not geared toward these to deliver on a significant scale, given the relative scale of need. Several UNDP stakeholders also suggested that getting directly operational in debris management meant that senior staff had to spend an awful amount of time on operational aspects of the interventions at the cost of providing strategic direction and leadership. **The perception that UNDP focused on direct delivery of activities like debris clearing for private houses and cash for work to increase its visibility like other humanitarian agencies also arose from a lack of clear communication strategy articulating how UNDP envisaged supporting the GoN in re-establishing government functions and worked with the latter in developing a short- and long-term strategy.**

27. **On the positive side of debris interventions, UNDP provided training to rural house owners in safe demolition. It developed guidelines and radio campaigns to train people in safe demolition which were – and are still being - used by many agencies. The radio programme had a wide coverage. Besides this, an innovation in the response was development of debris management app through Microsoft support.** This app was immensely helpful in monitoring volume of work and tracking payments made for cash for work during debris removal. Another innovative approach was the use of UNV mechanism through which UNDP recruited 90 local engineers to support debris management work. The UN volunteer engineers served as supervisors of cash-for-work brigades, providing technical instructions to workers and making important daily decisions on-site, in coordination with the UNDP international experts on demolition. The UN volunteers were the main users of the Microsoft debris management application, collecting data on the ground and transmitting these to UNDP.
28. The other response the CO had taken a strong lead on as **this built on its existing programme was livelihood intervention which the CO scaled up through DFAT funding rapidly after the earthquake.** UNDP has been implementing the Micro-Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP) since 2013. At least in seven of the affected districts, most of the entrepreneurs lost much of their assets. After a rapid assessment,²¹ UNDP mobilised additional funds through a supplementary grant from DFAT (US\$5.4 million)²² in May 2015 for rehabilitation of the affected entrepreneurs. Help-desks were set up in these 7 districts immediately after the earthquake. It is reported that UNDP was able to assist and rehabilitate over 10,000 micro-entrepreneurs who had lost their assets to the earthquake.
29. After the PDNA, the Regional Director visited Nepal and around the same time the CO took strategic decisions regarding a shift from debris removal for private houses to public

²¹ Through the Rapid Enterprise and Livelihoods Recovery Project (RELRP), UNDP set up helpdesks in seven of the 15 most-affected districts and collected data on losses and supported entrepreneurs in linking up with organisations providing relief (Source: Changing the Narrative – Building Back Better in Nepal, RELRP Project document, UNDP Nepal, 2015)

²² Out of a total budget of US\$9.6 million

infrastructure and temporary rehabilitation public buildings. This started giving UNDP better space to engage with the GoN on development of a national recovery framework. UNDP supported district authorities in preparing district recovery plans and linking these to their normal district development plans. UNDP also assisted the MoFALD in developing guidelines for district recovery plans.

30. **Government stakeholders interviewed for the AAR observed that they had little capacity to coordinate or articulate clear strategy for dialogue with DPs and other international agencies. This is one area where support from UNDP and other international agencies early on would have been helpful.** This was foreseen in the Surge Plan since the beginning but the space to engage with DPs was limited as the GoN was giving out conflicting signals, which delayed deployment of the aid management Surge advisor significantly. UNDP did subsequently get to work with the GoN during later part of the year when it played a key role in setting up and supporting the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) in December 2015. One reason why a long-term recovery strategy following the PDNA took several months to develop was the fact that political landscape in the country was in a state of turmoil after the promulgation of the new Constitution and the country having to deal with a blockade on the country's border. It is only in the first half of 2016 that a Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF) was drawn up. UNDP along with the World Bank (WB) and other development partners provided technical assistance to the NRA for preparing a 5-year PDRF which was launched in May 2016. The PDRF estimated a total financing need of \$8.37 billion, of which the GoN has already mobilised \$1.9 billion.²³

Lessons

- UNDP rightly identified debris management in post-earthquake situations a key need in most contexts. However, careful analysis is needed where UNDP can add significant value according to its niche and competence. While concentrating on debris management, UNDP needs to ensure prioritising support to the government and cluster in developing an overall recovery strategy, on the one hand, and rehabilitation of functioning public infrastructure and services in the immediate aftermath of a major earthquake, on the other.
- UNDP offers best value in disaster response in areas where it has pre-existing programmes and expertise that can be scaled up rapidly.
- In all disaster response, UNDP needs to ensure a clear communication strategy right from the start articulating how it envisages supporting the GoN in re-establishing government functions and work with the latter in developing a short term and long-term recovery strategy.

Interagency coordination

Findings

31. Early Recovery (ER) cluster was activated by day 2 after the earthquake, and it initially selected four areas of focus: debris management, restoration of governance and public services, livelihoods and rehabilitation of community infrastructure. According to key informants, later the government said that it would do the latter on its own and did not require the cluster to work on it. UNDP coordinated on ER in 14 districts in collaboration

²³ Supporting Nepal in Building Back Better – UNDP Strategy for Earthquake Recovery Assistance, UNDP, May 2016

with district disaster relief committees (DDRC). In each district, a district coordinator was appointed by UNDP, though recruiting them took time. **UNDP demonstrated flexibility and moved several people from its on-going projects to support the cluster.**

32. Separation of UNDP's programme response on ER and its cluster coordination role was not always clear. Stakeholders in the cluster saw UNDP imposing its own priorities as cluster focus – that the three pillars²⁴ of UNDP's own programme became, verbatim, the priorities of the cluster as well is cited as an example - and there was no clear vision or strategy for the overall cluster or attempt to develop a pathway from relief to early recovery through to recovery. One donor noted that **UNDP's focus on debris for its own operations and fundraising took its attention away from supporting the government and cluster in developing an overall strategy.** After an initial bout of enthusiasm, interest in the cluster waned and attendance in cluster meetings dropped as it failed to create a platform for dialogue with government on overall recovery. As was noted in the Humanitarian Country Team AAR,²⁵ while there were sectoral plans developed, a common longer-term joint strategy on recovery was missing. Considering the delay in preparing recovery framework and setting up the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), it would have been strategic for UNDP to provide technical support for developing multi-sector/cluster early recovery plan. The PDNA and Livelihood Assessment (October) could have served as solid foundation for a potential joint strategy on early recovery/recovery, developed much before the PDRF (May 2016). Looking back, around the time when cluster system was closing, UNDP's ER coordinator was leaving, and there was a gap period where no one on behalf of UNDP could support the GoN on development of a common longer-term strategy.
33. The humanitarian system, including large bi-lateral humanitarian donors are increasingly emphasising the need for greater cash response in post-disaster situations. Some donors (DFID) are even going to the extent of suggesting that cash should be the default response in future. This does raise opportunities and challenges in terms of financial infrastructure accessible to the poor and vulnerable, local economies and market mechanism, anti-corruption and transparency mechanisms etc. Expertise in this area is still in a state of infancy and several organisations/networks are working on it, though not always in a coherent manner. **An organisation like UNDP could uniquely position itself by developing capacity to provide advice and guidance to governments and donors in creating inclusive financial infrastructure to deal with challenges of a scaled-up cash based response.**
34. External stakeholders (donors and NGOs in particular) observed that the UN in general was weak in advocating with the GoN and DPs on financing mechanisms for recovery. The leadership of the RCO (and UNDP) on this was missing. The WB was much smarter and was able to take a lead on this. Besides, donors complained that several UN agencies approached them for funding on similar kind of work, without any coordination among them. After three months of the earthquake, the GoN re-imposed custom duties on supplies brought in by

²⁴ The pillars were: debris management; assessment of public and private buildings and restoration of community infrastructures; and restoration of public service delivery.

²⁵ Nepal Earthquake Humanitarian Country Team After Action Review, UN Nepal, December, 2015 (pp4)

NGOs and other humanitarian agencies – an issue which donors/NGOs felt could have been taken up jointly by RCO/UNDP and OCHA for dialogue with the GoN.

35. OCHA started folding up its presence in the districts from August-September, leaving a vacuum in coordination of recovery cluster in particular. NGOs interviewed indicated that they would have expected some **leadership from RCO and UNDP in providing a strategic steer on recovery during this period, particularly after OCHA had left.** This was partly done in three districts where UNDP positioned District Coordinators and Information Management Officers. After OCHA pulled out, UNDP supported the district administration to establish and lead District Recovery & Reconstruction Network. A critical issue that needs addressing at the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) level is managing the gap left behind by OCHA's premature departure while relief and early recovery work is still going on as happened in Nepal.

Lessons

- UNDP needs to ensure that it 'firewalls' the early recovery cluster role from its own early recovery programme in future. This would require greater awareness among CO staff of cluster roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability.
- UNDP needs to develop, working with local and national institutions (and UNCDF), specialized expertise in providing support (inclusive financial infrastructure, market and local economy assessments, cash transfer technology, transparency and assurance mechanisms etc) to cash-based response which is increasingly expanding in post-disaster response.
- Advocacy needed at IASC level to agree transition mechanism to coordinate recovery after departure of OCHA, especially where national capacity to coordinate international response is weak.

Resource mobilisation

Findings

36. The start up funds for the response came from BPPS/CRU and CPRTTF.²⁶ The immediate release of US\$160,000²⁷ from TRAC 1.1.3 and US\$1 million from Trust Fund to the CO was vital for launching the response. Besides this, working with MoFALD and development partners, UNDP got funds from LGCDP released immediately to each affected VDC and municipality for ER activities immediately after the earthquake. DPs agreed to fund temporary structures for 178 VDC buildings which were totally damaged. The CO was also successful in mobilising additional funds for emergency livelihoods support to beneficiaries of its existing microenterprise programme. Although the Flash Appeal launched on 29 April did not directly raise any funds for UNDP, responding to the appeal, the Government of Japan provided US\$1 million to UNDP on 21 May 2015 for debris management.

²⁶ CPRTTF is now replaced by Emergency Development Responses for Crisis and Recovery (EDRCR) funding window, managed by BPPS.

²⁷ Of this, US\$ 50,000 was earmarked for the RCO.

37. Donor partners were flexible with regards to reprogramming resources to allow the CO to respond to the most urgent needs on the ground (Australia, Korea, Denmark, Norway, Finland). A South-South resource mobilisation effort was also successfully implemented with Mauritius contributing US\$ 1,000,000 for UNDP's livelihood programme.
38. Funding environment in Nepal has been challenging, as transparency and accountability remain big issues across the country. UNDP programme in Nepal also had some bad reviews²⁸ and audit during 2013-14 which donors were concerned about that may have made fund-raising difficult in the early phase. A good communication strategy is crucial for resource mobilisation and positioning UNDP amidst the multiple organisations that responded following the earthquake. Immediately after the earthquake, a regional communications specialist based in Bangkok was deployed in Nepal as a trial "First Responder" which worked very well. That gave global media access to senior managers in Nepal resulting in good media coverage for UNDP. An excellent ExpRes roster communications officer was also sent as part of the Surge mission to support the Country Office. However, all these did not gain much traction with donors. At least a couple of regular donors to UNDP Nepal programme commented that UNDP did not develop clear communication messages for engaging with DPs and did not package its work in a way that made a good case for resource mobilisation.
39. It is reported that several offers came from private sector companies in Nepal to support the response, but UNDP was not able to capitalise these as there was no clear approach to engage with the private sector. UNDP should finalize a clear offer to the private sector in the future to pursue and receive support from the private sector in crisis contexts. A template for private sector fundraising was made available and shared with the CO. Agreements were signed with Chinese and Japanese private sector companies. (US\$ 125,000 mobilised). Intel foundation also provided US\$ 330,000 to the CO.

Lesson

- The inclusion of a communications specialist in the first responder team enabled UNDP get good media coverage and this practice should continue in future. Additionally, working with programme team the communications staff need to develop clear communication messages for key stakeholders like DPs, government and other humanitarian agencies.

AAR process

1. As part of lessons learning or review, UNDP ought to have carried out AAR periodically during the first six months to take stock and derive lessons and strategic thrust for the programme. AAR could be more valuable for shaping the response if undertaken on time.

²⁸ A mid-term review of a flagship risk reduction project, Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Programme (CDRMP), undertaken in 2013 was highly critical of UNDP's delivery capacity and overall contribution to project outcomes.

Summary of findings, lessons and recommendations

Sr.No	Key achievements	Lessons and recommendations for future
<i>Crisis Response - crisis trigger, decision-making and communication, internal coordination, scaling up</i>		
1	In the CO, a preparedness plan and BCP existed and multiple training and orientation were conducted 2-3 years before the earthquake.	<p>1. With staff changes, training, orientation and updating of preparedness/BCP need to be undertaken every six months.</p> <p>2. If staff are seriously affected, COs need to have discretion to allocate small funds to cover essential expenses for providing basic survival assistance to national staff.</p>
2	The activation of CB and triangular communication involving the CO, BRH and HQ worked very well to steer initial response and support the CO.	3. The role of CMST was crucial in success of the CB and ensuring that CB decisions were followed up at various ends.
3	Fast-track procedure for finance, procurement and recruitment was activated rapidly.	4. Although FTP was activated, the CO had to revert back to HQ for approvals frequently on recruitment. Additionally, lack of orientation of CO staff in implementing FTP sometimes caused delays.
4	Surge deployment was rapid and appropriate with right mix of expertise with national, regional and international experience.	5. Surge team members, once deployed, need to agree their leave plans with the CO, especially when they are deployed for very short periods (4-6 weeks).
<i>Operational response</i>		
1	UNDP was able to apply its SOP for emergency response and succeeded in mobilizing a whole-of-UNDP response and a substantial number of experts for early response, including activation of ER cluster.	1. While focusing on getting the operations going, a clear articulation of how UNDP would work with the GoN, other UN agencies, clusters and DPs towards developing a short- and long-term recovery strategy with a long-term vision is required to in the first few weeks.
2	While rapid deployments as was done in case of Nepal is appropriate and helped launch UNDP's initial response, greater attention was needed in developing and communicating UNDP's strategic positioning.	2. UNDP's response should be determined by how it positions itself early on in support of the government's overall recovery planning and strategy, and how it engages with various development partners and provides leadership to the early recovery clusters.

3	UNDP's leadership of the PDNA process, particularly in ensuring that PDNA addressed vulnerability and gender issues, is unanimously acknowledged as its most significant contribution.	3. During and after a PDNA, UNDP needs to ensure that it has good capacity to develop a well-articulated strategy and vision, and communicate these with DPs and government agencies.
4	UNDP produced a surge plan within two weeks of the disaster which identified three areas of focus: livelihoods and economic recovery; restoration of local governance function; and national capacities for recovery planning and DRR.	4. The surge plan needs to take into account clear analysis of interventions by other key actors, government priorities and donor environment in the country, besides needs of affected communities. To this extent, some form of assessment or rapid scan is needed 2-3 weeks after the disaster to determine UNDP's priorities.
<i>Programmatic response</i>		
1	UNDP rightly identified debris management as a critical need to focus on, and launched a response focusing on private houses which linked debris removal with cash for work for affected families, besides providing training to rural house owners in safe demolition. While the debris management work gained good visibility in the 3 VDCs UNDP supported, it was very small in scale compared to the need in the 14 most-affected districts.	1. Careful analysis is needed where UNDP can add significant value according to its niche and competence. While UNDP needs to pay attention to its own operations (debris clearance), this should not be allowed to take attention away from supporting the government in developing an overall strategy, on the one hand, and ensuring rehabilitation of functioning public infrastructure and services in the immediate aftermath of a major earthquake, on the other.
2	Collaboration with microsoft on debris management application and safe demolition education campaigns were appreciated and used by many agencies.	2. Promoting innovations and private sector engagement (with UNDP and governments) as some of the key focus of UNDP in disaster response could position it distinctly from other humanitarian agencies.
3	Partnership with UNV in mobilizing 90 UN volunteer engineers who administered implementation of cash-for-work activities on the ground.	3. Deploying UN volunteers instead of International Consultants meant that the former were highly effective in building rapport with and in rapidly assimilating into communities, thus enhancing UNDP's image among partners on the ground as an organisation that works with volunteers and promotes practice of volunteerism.
4	Rapidly launching appropriate livelihoods rehabilitation programme for affected families.	4. UNDP's response works best when it is linked to and builds on its ongoing programmes and competence.

<i>Interagency coordination</i>		
1	UNDP demonstrated flexibility and moved several people from its on-going projects to support cluster.	1. UNDP needs to ensure that it 'firewalls' its early recovery cluster role from its own early recovery operations in future.
2	After early departure of OCHA, UNDP did deploy district recovery coordinators and information management staff in 3 districts to fill the gap.	2. Advocacy needed at IASC level to agree transition mechanism to coordinate recovery after departure of OCHA, especially where national capacity to coordinate international response is weak. 3. UNDP needs to develop, working with local and national institutions (and UNCDF), specialized expertise in providing support (inclusive financial infrastructure, market and local economy assessments, cash transfer technology, transparency and assurance mechanisms etc) to cash-based response which is increasingly expanding in post-disaster response.
3	UNDP and RCO were weak in advocating with the GoN and DPs on financing mechanisms for recovery.	4. Dialogue with DPs and governments on financing mechanisms for early recovery and reconstruction needs to start immediately after a disaster and continuously developed during and after PDNA.
<i>Resource mobil</i>		
1	Immediate release of start up funds and reprogrammed resources worked very well.	1. Clear articulation of a medium- and long-term vision is needed to engage with donors early on in the response. Towards this end, deployment of senior communication staff capable of working with programme team to develop clear communication messages for donors is crucial.

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