



### **gFSC Urban Working Group Lessons Learned in the Urban Response Initiative: Nepal Earthquake Emergency April 2015**

A magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015. This was followed by several powerful aftershocks, including a major one (7.3 magnitude) on 12 May, 2015. The earthquake has had severe humanitarian implications in terms of shelter, food security, health and sanitation, and access to basic services. Over 750,000 buildings have been completely or partially destroyed, with critical infrastructure such as bridges, hospitals and schools heavily damaged.

The Nepal humanitarian assistance included urban areas strongly hit by the Earthquake. While the capital Kathmandu which counts over 1 million people was greatly affected, other smaller urban centers in surrounding Districts faced even greater damage. These include Gorkha, Dhading, Nuwakot, Sindhupalchok, and others. Across Districts, people have reported damage or complete loss to their key food stocks; 80 percent of households have lost their entire food stocks, and overall 55 percent of households have lost more than half of their cereal stocks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nepal Food Security Cluster report, May 2015.

This emergency highlighted once again the specificities of a humanitarian response in urban settings and the need of specific approaches. The Urban Working Group of the gFSC put together some lessons learned and best practices on this particular case that could serve as an input for the development of ad-hoc tools and coordination mechanisms, both to inform continued response to this crisis in Nepal as well as other future crises that affect urban areas.

The findings in this document are the result of consultations with all gFSC partners, both at national and global levels that were involved in the Earthquake Response, Co-Lead Agencies and the food security cluster in Nepal. The gFSC Urban Working Group would like to thank all partners for their valuable contributions.

The main lessons learned/highlights being captured are presented below:

### ***Low Level of Preparedness***

Although Nepal is well known for being at high risk of earthquakes and many preparedness activities have been put in place by government and aid agencies over the last years, the general impression in the April earthquake was that the awareness for evacuation, the infrastructure and shelter and emergency facilities in place were not adequate to face such events compared to the urbanisation rate.

Additionally the management of emergency shelters presented many gaps in particular in terms of WASH/hygiene and protection concerns. It is strongly advised to have coordinated government/aid agencies SOPs in place to ensure adequate emergency response procedures specific to urban settings are implemented timely and efficiently.

### ***Coordination and Inclusion of Urban Stakeholders is Essential***

The government requested international aid agencies to focus on rural areas and leave the Kathmandu Valley up to them. Government coordination proved to be quite efficient.

It was extremely important to adapt the coordination and clusters structures to the local context and ensure that national and local authorities have a leading role in their mechanisms. In urban settings in particular there were a number of local government actors as well as civil society/community organizations that needed to be included as key actors in coordination to avoid creating parallel and not integrated structures. Several non-traditional actors had quite a role to play in the assistance of the urban areas including local religious organizations, private sector, private foundations, schools and groups of individuals who provided all types of assistance such as temporary shelter, food and NFIs. It was however difficult to take into account the support provided by these stakeholders into the existing coordination structures.

Additionally local wholesalers, financial institutions and contractors also played a significant role in ensuring a timely and efficient response and should have been consulted in cluster activities.

### ***Importance of Having the Right Needs Assessment Tools***

Identifying and targeting vulnerable groups in urban areas poses a significant challenge for humanitarian organizations that have traditionally provided assistance to people living primarily in rural areas. The characteristics of vulnerability in urban settings are generally more complex and therefore require a different approach. Vulnerable people in cities tend to be harder to identify and more likely to move frequently.

In cases of rapid onset emergencies in particular, having the right set of assessment tools to identify needs of the urban population is essential to inform a rapid and ad-hoc response. In Nepal it was once again confirmed the lack of urban specific assessment tools. These should also include capacity assessments to identify livelihoods related skills and resources that can be utilised for early recovery. Caste-discrimination poses another significant challenge in Nepal to ensure equal access to relief and rehabilitation to all vulnerable groups.

The significant population movements that occurred from Kathmandu and other towns to rural areas also posed a challenge to identify vulnerabilities and related needs.

### **Markets are Key in Recovery**

For urban areas, main markets in Kathmandu as well as each of the listed Districts were critical to providing food, non-food items, shelter materials, and other products to neighbouring areas, including the more remote and mountainous VDCs. The rapidity with which these and other tertiary markets have been able to rebound has been and will continue to be important to Nepal's self-recovery. At the same time, the speed with which people are able to continue their agricultural and income-generating activities will also be key to recovery.

In terms of market tools, several organizations adapted their assessments and monitoring tools specifically to urban settings (such as AKVO flow; EMMA and labour marker based assessments) to achieve information on major markets hubs in towns and their links with rural areas. It was extremely important to take into consideration all aspects of the market chain of specific essential goods and services that were vital for assisting the affected population. It was however difficult to put in place and constantly update a common market monitoring system.

### **Cash-Based Responses are Key in Urban Areas**

Cash-based assistance in urban areas can serve as effective means to meet multiple needs across sectors and contribute to restoring livelihoods needs and assets. After the earthquake markets were restored quite rapidly and cash as a delivery mechanism has been prioritized in urban centres. The flow of remittances to urban areas has also significantly increased during the emergency and were predominantly going to Kathmandu.

However agreement on targeting, timing and amount of cash based intervention proved to be quite challenging among international stakeholders.

Additionally the Government had reservations relating to cash modalities, specifically medium to long-term unconditional and multi-purpose cash assistance for a number of reasons, including the creation of dependency and expectation of continued government support. The Nepal Cash Coordination Group is currently advocating for the use of more multi-purpose cash grants.

### **Annex I – Questionnaire**

#### **Gaps and Needs:**

- *Did you identify any specific gap while working in the urban settings in Nepal, in terms of tools and guidance, mechanisms and preparedness?*
- *And specific needs of the affected population in urban settings that were or should have been taken into consideration? Anything sectoral specific?*

**Assessment Tools and Indicators:**

- Which assessment tools and indicators did you use while working in an urban area?
- Anything specific/adapted for urban settings? (i.e. food security; livelihoods; income; expenditures; etc.)
- In case you had to adapt specifically for urban, what was the process you followed? And did you use tools/indicators from external sources or organizations?
- What was the main reason(s) you felt the need for specific urban tools and indicators in Nepal?

**Response Analysis:**

- Which are the factors that were taken into consideration for choosing the type of response/modality? Anything specific to an urban setting?
- Did you refer to best practices/lessons learned from other urban crisis? If yes which one and why?

**Coordination:**

- Any specific gap/aspect to be taken into account in terms of coordination in the urban response?

**Stakeholders Involved:**

- Which actors did you come across in urban settings different from other rural areas?
- Any particular urban stakeholder that should have been consulted in Cluster activities?

**Other Comments:**

Please provide any other comment and suggestion you might have on the Nepal experience and how the gFSC Urban WG could assist in strengthening the humanitarian urban response