Photographs: Aakash Vishwakarma, AMARC, Anshu Sharma, Milan Sharma, Rajendra Desai, Sarika Gulati, Shivangi Chavda and Siddharth Behl
Research, writing & design: Saferworld Communications, www.saferworld.in
THE HUMAN FACE OF RECOVERY NEEDS

As eight million people struggle to recover from the devastating earthquake impact, government and aid agencies are working hard to accurately assess the needs and assist appropriately.

This compilation delves into the human face of those needs, concentrating on seven core components:

1. **AIDING THE INVISIBLE**
   Unprecedented remoteness of villages and deep-rooted social vulnerabilities require alternative solutions; not just to operationalise rebuilding, but to aid long-term recovery.

2. **COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS**
   From generation and reporting of information to access and dissemination methods, communication has come a long way; but still has to better address the needs of stakeholders.

3. **SEEKING ‘SAFE’ SHELTER**
   Families are already finding ways to build back on their own. However, a lack of knowledge and rumours on what is safe is preventing building back better.

4. **COMFORTING THROUGH CLASSROOMS**
   For thousands of children who have lost not just their schools, but their homes and family members, a classroom is also a way to heal.

5. **LINKING TO LIVELIHOODS**
   While macro-economic focus is essential overall, a very micro-economic and local approach to recovering livelihoods is needed to safeguard economic safety nets of the most vulnerable populations.

6. **TACKLING TRAUMA: TRADITION VS. TREATMENT**
   Cultural perspectives and healing methods must be respected to ensure good intentions don’t cause more harm.

7. **WORKING WITH THE WOMEN**
   In a country where a vast majority of young men migrate for work, it is the women who are picking up the pieces; and they must be the focal point for reconstruction.

These components are based on our ground observations and analysis; including reference to work by Rajendra Desai, AMARC, CDAC and SEEDS. As assistance efforts move forward, such human stories should be dug out and their perspectives used to inform the direction and tenor of the medium and long-term recovery process.

Saferworld Communications
August 2015
While the earthquake recovery in Nepal will draw upon all the good practices followed in other recovery programmes in South Asia and elsewhere, it has to be developed and implemented in a way that is uniquely Nepali. The people of Nepal have demonstrated considerable resilience in coping with many adversities.

AIDING THE INVISIBLE
Unprecedented remoteness of villages and deep-rooted social vulnerabilities require alternative solutions; not just to operationalise rebuilding, but to aid long-term recovery.
“What can we do? As we live in a remote village, will we not be noticed?”

– Prahari, Kharelthok village, Havre district

During the first seven days after the earthquake, Prahari walked everyday for 30 minutes to fetch water for her family.

Thousands of people like her continue to struggle for food, water and shelter in the still cut-off villages up in the hills.
A bag of cement that costs Rs.500 in Kathmandu costs Rs.5000 in a remote village in the North. The ten-fold increase in costs must be reflected in budget allocations, but has implications far beyond that as well.

With means of access limited to helicopters, very few agencies are taking on these locations.

Designs for reconstruction must therefore be self-sufficient; using little to no imported materials and easily doable by the community themselves.

Targeted plans with specialised budgets and designs are critically required.
“We got ration and other supplies for this ward, but some of the families gave them to ward no 7 and 9. It is least accessible and we felt they need it more than us.”

– Mani Raj Bann, Jhangajholi village in Sindhuli

50-year-old Mani Raj Bann has seen many earthquakes in his lifetime. He feels that such catastrophes are times when one must also think of those who need the most assistance.

In Sindhuli, the unofficial rule has been to distribute evenly across all wards, on the basis of population.

This has meant token handouts in small numbers, even in wards which are more badly affected and most in need.

In other VDCs, some of the more remote wards have been left out of assessments and distribution.
Nature makes no distinction between affluent and non-affluent. Bhaktapur is a municipality, an urban area and the apparent class distinctions are not visible. However, as it is said that as you move to interiors, the street acts as an invisible wall for excluded communities. At Bhaktapur relief camp, a woman was filling a bottle of water and there was another woman who was at the edge waiting to take water. Although the gestures appeared normal, there was something else beneath the surface. Exclusion! The woman on the other edge was not allowed to touch the stored water!

Embedded into the social construct, this kind of discrimination is not always openly recognised or discussed. Yet, it becomes apparent in day-to-day dealings and needs to be incorporated sensitively into recovery planning.
COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS

From generation and reporting of information to access and dissemination methods, communication has come a long way; but still has to better address the needs of stakeholders.
IMPROVING MEDIA’S ROLE

How and what the media reports can change the entire perception of a disaster for the outside world; and can influence how people respond and recover.

At the same time, for the general public, the single largest source of information is the media. A sound understanding of disaster issues is therefore critical. The media can play a role not just in early warning and reporting disaster events, but as vehicles to disseminate public awareness and actually change behaviour. They can help communities build greater resilience over the longer term.

In Nepal, media coverage in the response phase was marred by negative incidents. Their role in the long-term recovery will be crucial and, if done appropriately, can be leveraged to really embed the concept of ‘build back better’ in the public consciousness.

THE A-F & S OF DISASTER REPORTING: 7 vital principles

ACCURACY
One word changes the story.

BALANCE
The types of coverage (or lack thereof) directly impact the type and volume of aid; and longer-term development of the area.

CONSISTENCY AND COLLABORATION
Collaboration between media, government and NGOs plays a vital role in public awareness.

DIGNITY
Restoring dignity to affected communities aids recovery.

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
Going beyond major disaster events alone gives a more holistic perspective; bringing disaster issues into the mainstream and making them accessible and relevant to everyday life.

FOLLOW-UP
Follow-up stories keep the issue alive over the medium and long-term where communities are often left to recover alone.

SAFETY
Putting safety first literally saves lives and ensures you ‘do no harm’ to the communities from which you are reporting.

Based on media guidelines prepared under the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project, http://nidm.gov.in/ncrmp.asp
In the aftermath of an emergency, communication as aid plays a critical role. Lack of the right communication at the right time can actually hinder the response process. This actually happened in the initial days of relief distribution in Chautura, where affected communities blocked the road for over 7 hours to force officials to talk to them.

Agencies such as Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) network and the IRIN news network actually did an incredible job of making communication a priority in the wake of the earthquake. A list of consolidated messages for communities was prepared, agencies assisted in restoring communication channels and there was a concerted effort to reach out across all affected areas. Yet, the communication gaps continue to be a challenge including:

- **Location-specific information:** Compiled information on the extent of damage across villages that are still cut off. Media reports and stories still focus mainly on specific ‘most affected’ districts; while other equally vulnerable ones have been left out.

- **Dissemination patterns and last mile connectivity:** The variety of languages and dialects poses a challenge; especially as face-to-face communication still continues to be a preferred method for communities. Trained community mobilisers who can reach those cut-off or living on the periphery of the communities are vital.

- **Response, then silence:** After the immediate response and relief distribution phase, there is quiet. Communities continue to require communication aid; perhaps even more so now. In addition to the work being done by communication agencies, clear statements by the Government are equally required. This void on both ends is giving rise to unsubstantiated rumours and panic that affect many issues, including how people are rebuilding.
This earthquake was a very positive example of different groups coming together to generate information very quickly. This was done mainly in the form of maps which no doubt proved useful in the initial days. As time went on, the demand for information remains high, but the technical information in the maps is rarely used. Exploring alternatives, both on what practical information is actually needed (accommodation options and fuel availability for example) and the way that information is shared with responding agencies can help bridge this gap.
Despite extremely adverse conditions, local broadcasters are displaying amazing courage and zeal to resume broadcasting. They are playing a very important role in informing survivors of the ongoing rescue and relief operations.

– Suman Basnet, AMARC Asia-Pacific

In the rural context of Nepal, where houses are located far apart and access (and acceptance) of other forms of media is limited; community radio plays a vital role. In a post-disaster context, this role becomes even more pronounced. They are an indispensable way to provide reliable information to vulnerable populations, help the humanitarian relief and ease the fear and worries of the population in tense situations. These stations are deeply rooted in their communities and serve as a focal point for the population to get the services they deserve and need in their language. They make a vital difference in getting the right information to the right people at the right time.

More than just an information source, the entire foundation of community radio as being a tool of the community, by the community and for the community means that it is one avenue to help communities regain a sense of control and hope. In this way, it also serves as an avenue to aid psycho-social recovery.
SEEKING A ‘SAFE’ SHELTER

Families are already finding ways to build back on their own. However, a lack of knowledge and rumours on what is safe is preventing building back better.
The construction of over 600,000 houses and related infrastructure is going to put enormous strain on the environment. In an ecologically fragile setting like Nepal, the environmental costs of reconstruction need to be taken into account. Certain recovery options such as quick deployment of pre-fabricated structures, expansion in capacity of brick kilns to meet construction demand and disposal of rubble in the valleys will have deeply detrimental and long-term impacts. The production of bricks is highly polluting and removes topsoil.

As an alternative, bamboo is locally available, locally appropriate and easy-to-use. It has strength and flexibility and its joinery is simple. Lightweight houses built with this ‘green steel’ are highly suitable for earthquake-prone areas. Bamboo doesn’t just have a low carbon footprint, but is actually good for the environment. It removes carbon from air and controls soil erosion and landslides by holding the earth together! It can also support local livelihoods as part of the broader ecosystem.
With no clarity on differentiation between types of cracks, families are actually tearing down upper floors of their houses that could easily be repaired! The epidemic of disappearing upper floors has spread fast, propelled by rumours, fears and a major shortage of assessments by trained engineers. Equally worrying is the potential impact that it will have on these families in the long-term as they seek to re-build their upper stories for more space, but find it economically inviable. The very character of the houses is changing and without any need to do so.
A common misconception currently abounds that RCC houses are safer than old traditional ones. More RCC buildings may have survived this earthquake, but that does not make them safer. The intensity and shaking in this earthquake happened to be just above the tolerance limit of very old structures and just below the failure point of new RCC buildings. In other words, if the buildings had been of the same age and maintenance, they may have performed the same. There is no guarantee that these RCC buildings will survive a future, more intense earthquake.

RCC has a life span of 50-80 years, which is most often reduced further due to common malpractices in construction. This includes the right cement-sand mix, quality of steel, workmanship in tying steel frames and adequate curing (three weeks). Haphazard RCC construction is actually more dangerous than traditional houses.

The primary reason for safety from shaking in RCC buildings is the tied frames. This can be done in traditional buildings too using lintel beams and corner reinforcements. It'll be cheaper, more beautiful and multiple times more environmentally-friendly.

“*We plan to make a new home. This time, we will make a concrete one as it will make it earthquake-resistant.*” – Purushotam Neopani, Jasithok village, Kavre district
“We started to rebuild it again the same way we did it earlier. We just hope it won’t fall again.”
– Bishnu Bahadur, Mangal Taal, Sindhuli district

Families cannot wait in tents for a long period for reconstruction schemes to materialise. They are already building back on their own using available resources and knowledge.
COMFORTING THROUGH CLASSROOMS

For thousands of children who have lost not just their schools, but their homes and family members, a classroom is also a way to heal.
The evenings are somber and the fear grows as it settles into a quiet evening in Bhaktapur. In the community camp, 7-year old Prajiya and 5-year old Shailesh do not understand the gravity of the situation, but they do miss their home. From a glorious house to ravaged ruins to the community kitchen which now provides them with food and water, it has been a sudden change.

Prajiya keeps doodling sketches of shelters on the earth with few flowers kept on edges, as if paying tribute to the lost home!
Indira and Regina study in class 3 and Khannkumari in class 8. Since the earthquake struck, they have been unable to attend school. The primary school buildings in ward no 7 and 2 of Jhangajhouri village, Sindhuli district date back over 22 years. Today, they have turned to rubble. The girls are eager to get back to their school but the reconstruction may take longer than they wish.
FEELING AN ACUTE LOSS...

School is more than a place to study. It is a place of structure and safety. Children who have lost their homes and their schools acutely feel the absence of their schedules and their recovery from the trauma is slowed down because of it.

BUT STUDYING BRINGS HOPE

The decision to re-open schools and hold exams at the usual time has brought back a sense of normalcy and hope to the children. Scenes of studying on the road, in front of emergency tents and on construction sites are now common.
With over 32,000 classrooms destroyed, temporary learning centres have been a key factor in getting children back to school. However, the structures may not be robust enough to last until permanent reconstruction is complete. Access to these for all affected families is also proving difficult and in some of the more remote places, teachers are unable to even reach to resume classes. Consideration of alternative designs and locations is needed to ensure as many children as possible continue a normal routine.
Schools are also a vehicle to keep track of children. For protection and trafficking issues are emerging as significant but hidden challenges, especially in remote and cut-off locations where monitoring is an issue.
LINKING TO LIVELIHOODS

While macro-economic focus is essential overall, a very micro-economic and local approach to recovering livelihoods is needed to safeguard economic safety nets of the most vulnerable populations.
“Around twenty-thousand (10-12 man) Nepali rupees worth of rice was buried under the debris. Now it has even started growing and is no use to us.”
– Dharamdhoj Karki, Kothe village, Sindhupalchowk district

The loss of agricultural crops is a major setback for communities across affected regions. Farmers that have missed the planting season this monsoon will be unable to harvest rice – the country’s staple food -- again until late 2016. This, together with likely losses of food stocks and wheat and maize harvests, will severely limit food supplies and incomes.

It is not just the clearing of the land that is an issue. Thousands of small and medium-scale irrigation systems have been destroyed in the earthquake. Providing assistance to restore these farmer-managed systems can also be an opportunity to pilot earthquake-resistant small-scale irrigation schemes.
The destruction of heritage monuments and tourist guesthouses, coupled with a fear of another earthquake is having a massive impact on Nepal’s tourism industry. One of the major contributors to the economy and a source of livelihood, losses in tourism revenues will directly impact Nepal’s projected economic growth in the coming year. The recovery of two major temples is high on the conservation agenda, but softer components of tourism including Nepal’s trekking attractions need to be considered as well.
“This is our livelihood. We can’t leave this and go, even if we are scared to go inside.” - Chandra Pyaari, Jhangajoli, Sindhuli who remains at her small cloth shop even though the deep cracks and tilted pillars continue to give them sleepless nights.

Micro-enterprise is embedded in Nepali life. Families outside Kathmandu almost all sell one item or another out of their houses. This part home, part shop concept has meant that the collapse of each house is also a collapse in that family’s livelihood.
“Bhaktapur was our home, our place of work, our way of life.”
– Prajapati, a local tour guide in Bhaktapur

Unlike many other tourist attractions in the world, the UNESCO world heritage site of Bhaktapur is not just a place to see. It is a living, breathing ecosystem of culture that supports some of the most niche artistic traditions and livelihoods.

This includes handicrafts such as pottery and woodwork, trade in the form of small shops and restaurants, services to the tourist inflow in terms of heritage guides and hawkers, specific vocations such as traditional mustard oil extraction and agriculture on the periphery of the settlements. All are an integral part of the area’s ‘living heritage’ stature. These need to be retained and strengthened as part of the recovery initiative. Local entrepreneurs can be the engines of economic recovery.

The same holds true of many other less-known but equally precious temples and heritage buildings across the country.
In the more remote regions, the access to markets is dependent upon roads that no longer exist. Considering that produce is sold raw (as milk, eggs, etc.), this severely limits livelihood options. Access to markets must be restored as a priority. Another possibility is value addition for the raw materials (cold storage or incentive to create products such as cheese) that ensures longer shelf life.
TACKLING TRAUMA: TRADITION vs. TREATMENT

Cultural perspectives and healing methods must be respected to ensure good intentions don’t cause more harm.
Primary health centres in many VDCs have collapsed. Access to hospitals and health clinics for those most in need is still proving difficult. Especially for pregnant and lactating mothers in the more remote areas, restoration of basic healthcare services is an immediate would be required.

“The Primary Health Centre in Dhawa VDC had fallen down. Fortunately, nurses and doctors were there. I am glad my wife was able to deliver in safe hands.”

– Sunita’s husband, Gorkha district
FROZEN WITH LOSS...

No doubt the immensity of loss is of an unimaginable scale, with portraits of those frozen in shock or contemplation.

BUT ALSO LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Yet, as families clear rubble stone by stone, they are dealing with their loss in a very personal and forward-looking manner.
Outsiders and experts state that psycho-social impact and mental health are emerging as very prominent issues among survivors. How they deal with it has different views.

Locally, it’s a very different kind of perspective – a sense of asking forgiveness rather than blaming God for the sorrows that befell them. A Kshama Pooja is a local type of group counselling that is being commonly practiced. It differs completely in approach from Western talking approaches, but is a deep-rooted local system.

It may be more apt to facilitate and improvise on such local methods, rather than force-fitting imported therapies.
WORKING WITH THE WOMEN

In a country where a vast majority of young men migrate for work, it is the women who are picking up the pieces; and they must be the focal point for reconstruction.
The engagement of women in the construction process will have multiple advantages. It will fill the shortage of workforce able to carry out construction, created by heavy migration of men from the villages. It will support the local economy as construction labour money will remain locally rather than be paid to workers who have come from outside the area or the country. It will also provide a source of livelihood for women and will ensure quality in construction. Women are already doing physical labour that can be channelled into this work. Women mason's programmes have been carried out in other places and can be successfully done at scale in Nepal in the current context.