A close-up photograph of an elderly woman's hand. The hand is wrinkled and brown, resting on a red fabric with intricate patterns. She is wearing several red bangles with gold dots. To the left, a piece of brown fabric with a red floral embroidery is visible.

NEPAL: A YEAR AFTER THE EARTHQUAKES

**A SPOTLIGHT ON NEPALI
WOMEN AND GIRLS,
THEIR STORIES AND THEIR
SOLUTIONS**



UN WOMEN'S MANDATE AND NETWORK

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs world wide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting.



UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality. UN Women works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls.

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FOREWORD

Seventeen months ago a violent earthquake struck Nepal, taking the lives of thousands of people and devastating the lives of many more. As the country attempted to come to terms with the full extent of the devastation, UN Women and our local partners traveled to some of the worst-affected districts to assess the situation of women and girls and to provide immediate relief and lifesaving information and services to those who needed it most.

At the same time, leading women's groups came together with UN Women to determine the actions they would collectively take and identify the measures that needed to be put in place to ensure that women's voices, participation and leadership were at the heart of the response. To this end, women's groups issued a Common Charter of Demands as a call to action, a call that continues to serve as a reminder that the women and girls affected by the disaster not only had needs to be met, but also play a central and vital role in building back their country, better and safer.

Within a month, UN Women and its local partners SAATHI, Women for Human Rights (WHR) and the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) established five multi-purpose women's centres in some of the most harshly-affected districts: Gorkha, Kavre, Kathmandu, Nuwakot and Sindupalchowk. These centres provided non-food items, including dignity kits, radio sets and solar lanterns, as well as services, such as psycho-social support, cash-for-work activities and referral services. In addition, several information desks were established in partnership with the Media Advocacy Group (MAG) in order to disseminate awareness-raising information to survivors of violence. These initiatives were undertaken in close coordination and collaboration with central and local government bodies and with the generous and timely support of the Government of Denmark.

Now, almost a year and a half later, after the rubble has been cleared and as the people of Nepal continue to rebuild their lives, women and girls are at the forefront of recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. Some of their voices and stories are collected here. They are stories of loss, fear and struggle. But ultimately they are stories of hope and resilience that highlight the myriad opportunities available to build back a better and safer Nepal.

Women and girls also have a key role to play in better preparing their communities for future natural disasters. That's why three of the multi-purpose women's centres established by UN Women and its partners are now working with local communities to ensure the integration of gender equality in longer-term disaster recovery, reconstruction and preparedness initiatives.

Much remains to be done, and UN Women will continue to work closely with the Government of Nepal, including the National Reconstruction Authority, and with women's groups and other partners. These stories of positive change in the midst of tragedy – of pushing forward against all odds – demonstrate how women and girls are leading the way as powerful forces of change.



**MR. ZIAD SHEIKH,
REPRESENTATIVE, UN WOMEN NEPAL**

FOREWORD

For many years, Denmark has focused its efforts on supporting men and women in Nepal in their quest for a better life by promoting democracy, peace, social and economic progress, as well as respect for human rights. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been and will continue to be central to these efforts.

From ensuring access to schooling, to providing better cooking stoves and access to renewable energy; from facilitating access to finance, to improving the social and economic status of women and girls, Denmark is committed to supporting Nepal as the country moves to fully realize the rights of women and girls. Partnerships with both state and non-state actors have proven critical to implementing Denmark's strategic focus on the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda.

When the earthquakes struck in April and May of 2015 more than 8000 lives were lost, more than half of whom were women and girls. It is widely recognized that during periods of turmoil and disaster, it is even more challenging for women and girls to access their rights. The devastating impact of the earthquakes demonstrates all too vividly the need for better protection of the most vulnerable among us. All too often the needs and priorities of women - even those most affected by disaster - are deemed less important, and women are less likely to access the pathway to recovery and rehabilitation.

Over many years UN Women and Denmark have developed a close partnership in Nepal and it was therefore only natural for Denmark to support UN Women's efforts to better the lives of earthquake-affected women and girls.

This publication summarizes the support provided by Denmark through UN Women. It is deeply touching to hear the stories shared by women and girls on how their lives have changed for the better as a result of Denmark's engagement.

It is my sincere hope that this publication will provide insight into the journey from devastation to aspiration for women and girls across Nepal, and that it will serve as inspiration to continue efforts to secure a brighter future for women and children around the world.



**MS. KIRSTEN GEELAN
AMBASSADOR, EMBASSY OF DENMARK IN NEPAL**



KALPANA SHRESTHA, SINDHUPALCHOWK

PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING HELPS EARTHQUAKE SURVIVORS IN NEPAL OVERCOME LOSS

Severely traumatized after losing her four-year-old daughter during the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, Kalpana Shrestha is on the road to recovery today, thanks to psychosocial counselling she received at a UN Women-supported multi-purpose women's centre in Sindhupalchowk District. To date, the centre has provided psychosocial counselling to nearly 500 women and young girls.

On 23 April, Kalpana Shrestha dropped her four-year-old daughter off at her mother's house for a few days. Kalpana returned home to her village in Sano Sirubari, two hours away in the central part of Nepal, but promised to pick her up soon. "My daughter loved spending time with her grandparents, and she got to drink fresh buffalo milk," she says.

Two days later, at around 11.30 a.m., Kalpana's mother left her granddaughter sleeping in her cot while she caught up on her household chores. At 11.56 a.m., the ground started shaking violently. It was the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that hit Nepal on 25 April and killed 9,000 people. The shock was so severe that her house collapsed immediately.

The strong aftershocks kept coming so no one could go in to pull Kalpana's daughter out. Kalpana rushed back to find the house turned to dust. She tried to dig her daughter out, with help from her parents, but it was too late.

"They told me she was dead. They pulled her body out. I don't remember what happened to me after that. I passed out," Kalpana says, recalling the horror of that day, tears welling in her eyes. "I had left her with my mother so that she could drink buffalo milk and be healthy. I should have kept her with me... Maybe then she would've survived."

This is not the first tragedy in Kalpana's life. A few years ago, she lost her eldest child, a two-year old, in a drowning accident. "It took me a long time to get over that tragedy. At least I had my younger daughter then. Now she is also gone," Kalpana says, wincing at the memory.

The days following the earthquake are all still a blur for Kalpana. She has little recollection of what happened to her.

"We lost her to the trauma and pain of losing her children," says her sister-in-law, Renu Shrestha. She says Kalpana suffered severe depression and would just stare into space, not responding to



anything. Then she would disappear for weeks. "Her mother-in-law spent days looking for her, following her trail and bringing her safely back," says Renu.

Sarita Shrestha is a social mobilizer for the women's organization, SAATHI, in Sindhupalchowk. In response to the April and May earthquakes, SAATHI, with support from UN Women Nepal, has been running a multi-purpose women's centre (MPWC) in Chautara, Sindhupalchowk District, providing health, legal, psychosocial, livelihood and other support for women earthquake survivors. To date, the centre has provided psychosocial counselling to nearly 500 women and young girls.

Sarita learned about Kalpana's condition while visiting homes in her area, and knew right away that she needed counselling and mental health assistance, so she approached SAATHI's psychosocial counsellor, Juni Maya Shrestha, who decided to pay Kalpana a home visit.

When Juni arrived, Kalpana refused to come out and talk. After much coaxing, she did, but would not answer questions. "She had her head down; she refused to meet my eyes, and would keep staring at her hands mindlessly," recalls Juni.

She knew this was only the beginning of a long road to counselling. Juni spent a long time just talking to Kalpana and making her feel comfortable, building trust. Kalpana dropped by the MPWC several times over the following months, talking to Juni and participating in counselling sessions.

Almost seven months since Juni's first visit to Kalpana, on this particular March day, Kalpana greeted Juni and her team wearing her best clothes, eager to tell her story of recovery.

"Kalpana is a totally different person; she is happy; she is active helping her family; she is healthy. But most importantly, she is open to talking about the trauma she went through with the death of her children," says Juni.

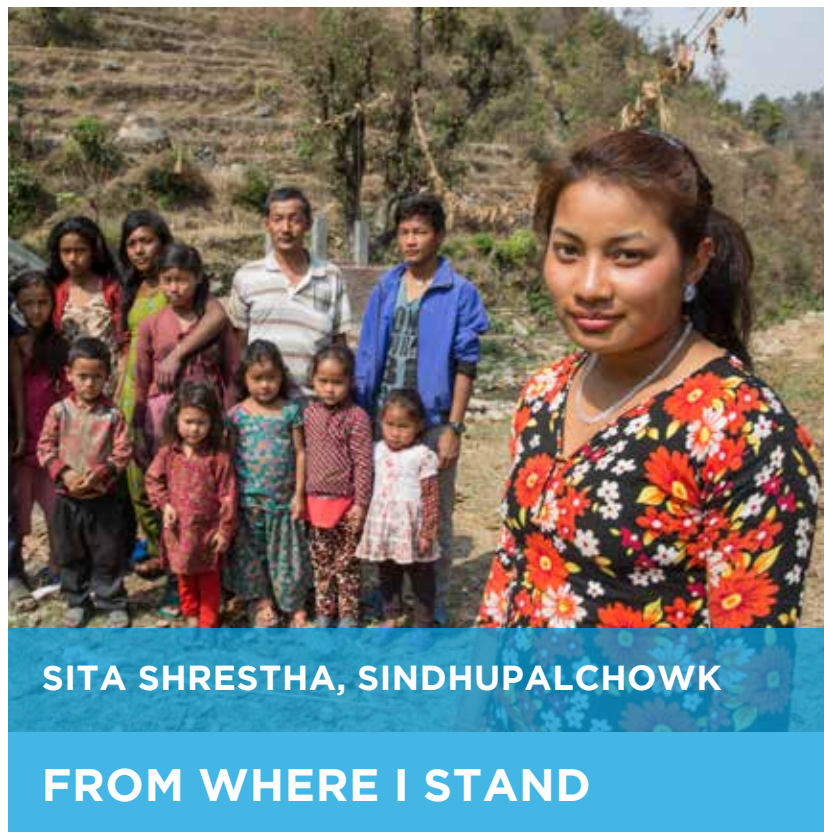


There is warmth and trust between Juni and Kalpana. “I like visiting the Centre, it makes me feel safe to know that there are people that I can talk to about how bad or good I feel,” says Kalpana. “They have taught me that what I have is a mental illness, and that it can be managed.”

When she lost her first baby, she dealt with the trauma because she had another to take care of. “When I lost my youngest, I didn’t have anyone to live for,” says Kalpana, “But now I know that I have to live for me; that I have to be healthy and happy because my family, my in-laws depend on me.”

Kalpana is now beginning to think about what she wants to do in the future. She wants to learn a skill she’ll enjoy and to make money. “I’ve always wanted to open a hair and beauty salon—I could cut women’s hair, put makeup on brides, do their nails and make them feel better.”

And she is no longer in a rush to have more children. “My doctors, counsellors, family tell me I am just 25; that if I want to have children, I have plenty of time,” she says, adding with a smile: “For now I want to concentrate on my health and on my happiness.”



SITA SHRESTHA, SINDHUPALCHOWK

FROM WHERE I STAND

Sita Shrestha, 19, took part in a two-day training on development organized by the UN Women local NGO partner SAATHI, following which she helped construct a tap and organize villagers to turn a natural water source into a public space they could share. Sustainable Development Goal 6 seeks to ensure universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.

“For as long as I can remember, I have been walking miles every morning before school to fetch water for my family. Many in the village [Chilaune, near Nepal’s capital city of Kathmandu] had to walk for hours to get water for cooking and cattle. Water shortage has always been one of the biggest problems of my village. Post-earthquake, as the spouts started mysteriously drying up, the need for a solution was more urgent.

After [attending] a two-day training on leadership, I knew I wanted to find a solution for the water shortage problem in our village. There was one particular natural spout that everyone had been using since the others dried up. But the way the community was using it was chaotic; there was dirt everywhere, the floor was slippery and people had to wait hours for their turn.

We fundraised in the village, took a small loan and bought cement, sand, concrete to be carried all the way down from the main road. The earthquakes had destroyed the walking paths, so we had to first build proper paths so it was safe for those carrying the loads. We even brought in a tank from the town to store water. We have built a little canal so that the used water can be recycled for irrigation. Now no water goes to waste here. In the next phase, I want to build a few rooms near the tap so villagers can take a bath in privacy. But most importantly, I want to supply water to more households in the village. Nobody, especially not women and school-going children, should have to walk for hours for water. We have the ability to take the water to more homes—and that is what we will do next.

The training and this project have been a life-altering experience. I have become more confident, have started thinking about how else I can help my community and plan for the future. I am graduating from high school this year. I want to study social work. There is a lot of satisfaction in helping others, I want to be able to continue to do that in the future.”





SUK MAYA GURUNG, GORKHA

SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE IN POST DISASTER

After the devastating earthquakes in Nepal, a local woman takes an active role in humanitarian action as an interpreter and social mobilizer.

A few days after the 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Nepal on 25 April 2015, the the wounded started streaming in to Gorkha Bajar, a small town some 150 kilometres from the capital of Kathmandu. The epicentre was less than four hours away by car on rough mountain terrain. As some villages didn't have roads, many injured were flown in to the district headquarters in Gorkha Bazaar by helicopter.

"Survivors were everywhere, by the roadside, in open fields; it was total chaos," says Sarita Dhakal, district coordinator for Women for Human Rights (WHR), an organization that works for the rights of Nepali single women and UN Women's local partner in Gorkha.

A few days later, shelters were set up in front of the Gorkha Palace Museum. When Ms. Dhakal and her team arrived at the site, with dozens of small tents inside the museum, they found over 400 injured survivors. They set out to document them.

But they faced a big obstacle. "Very few people actually understood what we were saying," says Ms. Dhakal. Many of the injured were from the mountainous part of the district, where the national language Nepali is not spoken. "We hit a wall; no one on our team could speak the Gurung language."

In the same tent, Suk Maya Gurung, 35, was nursing her six-year-old back to health. Ms. Gurung had brought her two daughters from the village of Gumda, via helicopter so she could take her daughter to the hospital.

Ms. Gurung knew many in the tent because they were neighbours, family and friends. Some years ago, she had taken first aid training, so those she knew in the shelter came to her for advice on how to dress wounds and prevent infection. "There were so many people in need," she recalls.



Ms. Gurung volunteered her services and started helping out with interpretation, talking to the community, finding out what their needs were.

"In the weeks that followed, Ms. Gurung became such an invaluable member of the team," says Ms. Dhakal. "She knew the community. She could talk to them directly. She was the one her villagers and friends trusted." Ms. Gurung was hired as staff after the initial weeks and has been working as a social mobilizer for WHR ever since.

Ms. Gurung finds the work very fulfilling because she gets to work with the community and use her social and language skills. "I have learned a lot at WHR—about women's rights, domestic violence, gender discrimination, women's property rights and about sexual violence," she says.

Whenever anyone in her community is in trouble she is the first point of contact for WHR. Ms. Gurung visits homes, keeps up with news from her community, and can often be found talking to women and children at the Multi-purpose Women's Centre (MPWC) in Gorkha Bajar, which WHR set up with support from UN Women Nepal. As of February 2016, 1,269 women, including older women, women living with disabilities and widowed women, have received various kinds of services from the centre.

"The MPWC is a safe space. I may not be equipped to deal with all the issues that come to me, but there are people who can help with counselling, with legal aid, livelihood support, etc.," she says.



Recently, Ms. Gurung helped stop two women from her village from being trafficked. “In my rounds, I learned that two women were being taken away by pimps to India for work, so I immediately contacted the district women and children officer,” she says. With the help of the police, and WHR Kathmandu offices, they were able to send message to the border patrol that intercepted and sent the women safely back to their families. “It is successes like these that make me proud of the work I do,” says Ms. Gurung.

Raised by a single mother, Ms. Gurung struggled her entire life. She was able to attend school but had to stop after Grade 10 for lack of money. At 17, she was married off to a man who worked in the Nepalese Army, and had few opportunities to work.

Ms. Gurung believes that in order to be empowered, women have to be financially self-sufficient. After her stint with WHR, she is looking to learn a new skill so she can earn a living. “I want to create jobs so that women don’t have to depend on anyone,” she says. “Social service is my calling and I want to contribute by making women financially independent.”



SHANTA TAMANG, KAVRE

A FAMILY REBUILDS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL

In the aftermath of two devastating earthquakes in Nepal, a long-time UN Women NGO partner is supporting vulnerable families in rural areas not often reached by humanitarian assistance and providing more than 5,400 households with much-needed aid

As the fateful earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April, 22-year-old Shanta Tamang went into labour. Shanta's mother managed to find a local taxi and rushed her to the nearest hospital. The next day, baby Rehan was born. Shanta and her baby went home in an ambulance the following day.

Instead of the joy of a mother coming home to celebrate the event, Shanta and Rehan joined their family of 12 in a small makeshift shelter. The family, including her grandmother, 18-year-old sister-in-law Kopila and her baby, their respective husbands and other children, all sleep on one mat. The floor and back wall is a dirt bank, the roof is the sum of some corrugated sheets and the front, just a piece of blue tarpaulin, open to the elements. The only light is a tiny oil lamp, sitting in a niche dug into the dirt wall. Shanta's situation is not unique, and many in her community are facing similar conditions after the earthquake.

This family of traditional farmers, has worked on the land and over the years created beautiful flat terraces from what once was sheer hillside, allowing them to access the land, and grow their crops.

Their home located in Dakshinkali, an agricultural region on the ridgeline of the high hills just outside of Kathmandu City, was completely destroyed by the earthquake, and everything they owned is now gone. The men in the family farmed the land around the house, and usually managed to get by, but still it was a hand-to-mouth existence, with no chance of saving money, not even to buy a blanket or soap.

This shelter is the best they could make from what they could find around them. The nearest water source is 15 minutes' walk away, and has to be carried back in containers, held inside traditional baskets. Shanta, with her new baby, joins her 18-year-old sister-in-law Kopila Tamang, who herself has a 5-month-old baby, Jivan. Two young mothers who are barely able to care.



The sanitary conditions are dangerous. The family toilet was also destroyed at the same time as their home. Their latrine is now an open field. The babies, young children, and elderly grandmother are most vulnerable to sickness as a result.

This family was discovered facing these harsh conditions by Pourakhi, an NGO set up with assistance from UN Women's predecessor organization in 2003. With members working at the grass-roots level with women and in communities across Nepal, the organization's founder directed Pourakhi members to scour the region to identify women, young babies and the elderly – who may face higher risks as a result of the earthquake, due to their social condition, illness and poverty.

A Pourakhi member located Shanta's family, identified them as needing urgent help, and provided assistance. Pourakhi is distributing urgently needed aid such as tents, mats, blankets and dry food such as rice and noodles. So far, the UN Women partner has reached out to more than 5,400 households in the four hardest-hit districts.



LAXMI BISWOKARMA, GORKHA

GETTING BACK ON HER FEET AGAIN

“I don’t have big plans... all I want is to go abroad, earn some money, pay off my loans, have some savings for old age and be at peace.”

It is early morning in the outskirts of Gorkha Bazar, headquarters of Gorkha district and the epicentre of the April 2015 earthquake. Laxmi Biswokarma, 39, is walking towards her house with a small load of firewood on her back. “This load is not heavy; I just can’t carry that much,” she says, as she climbs a small slope towards her house.

It has been an extremely challenging year for Laxmi. She returned to Nepal a year ago from Dubai, where she worked as a domestic worker. “I returned because I had excruciating pain in my back. I couldn’t work; I couldn’t sit,” she says as she sets the firewood down.

Laxmi took a leave of absence for a few months in January last year, and was admitted to a hospital in the capital, Kathmandu. On 25 April 2015, when the 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit central Nepal, Laxmi was still in hospital. The doctors diagnosed her with diabetes and tuberculosis and said she needed physiotherapy if she wanted to walk again, but her savings had run out by then. “I didn’t even have enough money for food, how could I afford medicine and therapy?” she says.

Six years earlier, when Laxmi left Nepal for the first time, she went to Oman as a migrant worker. When she returned, she used her savings to build a house near the village of Uiya, over 200 kilometres from the capital of Kathmandu, and just above the epicentre of the devastating earthquake. She lived there for a few years before leaving for Dubai. “Now that home is gone, turned into a pile of dust,” she says.

Laxmi hasn’t been able to muster the courage to go to her village. Her house was built with mortar and bricks so it wouldn’t have withstood the earthquake.





After leaving the hospital, she came to Gorkha instead, where Suk Maya Gurung, social mobilizer of UN Women’s partner organization, Women for Human Rights (WHR), heard about her situation. “She was renting a cheap room on the outskirts of town; she didn’t have food, or medicine... she didn’t even have anyone to give her water when she was thirsty,” says Suk Maya.

Fortunately for Laxmi, with support from UN Women and Women and Children Office, a local women’s group in Gorkha, WHR had set up a multipurpose women’s centre as part of the humanitarian response to the earthquake. The multipurpose women’s centre provides trauma counselling, dignity kits, solar lamps, information, referrals, carry out women’s safety audits and facilitate early recovery and livelihood activities.

Laxmi was advised to come to the multipurpose centre, where she could get help, spend some time with other women, receive psychosocial counselling, and make sure that she could take her medicine. “I would go there every other day—they would give me nutritious food; I could get help taking a bath; they took me to the hospital,” says Laxmi. “I probably would have died had it not been for the help I received at the multipurpose centre.” Eight months into her treatment and therapy, Laxmi is a different person today. WHR’s psychosocial counsellor Bimala Amgai says “When I started to talk to her in July, she was mentally broken and talked about wanting to die all the time,” she says, adding: “Laxmi couldn’t even lift herself properly, now she can walk and take care of herself and is thinking ahead.”

Today, as she gets her strength back, Laxmi is planning for the future. She wants to start working so she can pay back the loan she took to complete her treatment. She wants to learn a new skill such as the English language. “I have no education, but if I can at least learn English, I will be more attractive when I apply for jobs abroad,” she says.

She is modest but hopeful about the future as she talks about going abroad again as a migrant worker. “I don’t have big plans... all I want is to go abroad, earn some money, pay off my loans, have some savings for old age and be at peace.” Laxmi Biswokarma, 39



RAJANI BK, KAVRE

REACHING OUT TO SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE IN POST-EARTHQUAKE NEPAL

BK was experiencing double trauma: the feeling of helplessness and homelessness since the earthquake and having been abused by her father almost all of her life. or check the website

Rajani BK*, 26, was sitting in front of her house when her father came home early in the morning and started verbally abusing her mother, who was getting ready to go to work. “He was drunk, angry and started threatening to kill my mother,” says BK. She tried to intervene, and was dragged near a wall, and thought she was going to die. This was not the first time BK felt physically threatened by her father. She doesn’t remember a time when he was not abusive.

BK hasn’t been able to sleep properly since the 25 April 7.8-magnitude earthquake and 12 May 7.3-magnitude aftershock that devastated Nepal. Her house was destroyed, but she couldn’t even live in the temporary tent that was set up by her family because she feared her father would assault her. “If we had a house, I would know where to hide to stay away from my father, but in a tent, I didn’t feel secure enough,” says BK.

BK belongs to the marginalized Dalit community, which represents 13 per cent of Nepal’s total population of 28 million, according to Nepal’s 2011 census. Dalits are one of the poorest communities in the country, with 42 per cent under the poverty line, as opposed to 23 per cent of non-Dalits.

The 2014 Report of the UN Secretary-General on gender equality in natural disasters underlines the likelihood of rape and sexual violence rising during natural disasters.

Prema Poudel is in charge of the Kavre multipurpose women’s centre set up by the Women’s Rehabilitation Centre, with support from UN Women and in coordination with Nepal Government’s Women and Children Office in Kabhre as part of humanitarian response to the recent disasters. The multipurpose women’s centre provides dignity kits, solar lamps, trauma counselling, information, referrals, carries out women’s safety audits and facilitates

early recovery and livelihood activities. Ms. Poudel says there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of sexual and domestic violence against women survivors since the earthquake.

“Most women are living in tents where it is not safe, and women are the easy targets,” says Ms. Poudel. There are no official numbers available yet but social mobilizers and first responders also confirmed this rise in numbers.

Ashmita Tamang, district psychosocial counsellor with Nepal-based Centre for Victims of Torture reiterates that the number of domestic and sexual violence cases she has dealt with have increased. Social mobilizers in the multipurpose women’s centre have been spreading the word about the centre in their visits and they have also sought help from local newspapers to inform women about services offered. “Many women come to us out of curiosity and also to collect dignity kits, but we make it a point to talk to them to understand the big picture,” says Ms. Tamang.

After years of abuse, last month BK couldn’t take it anymore and she ran away to the centre in Kabhre, some 50 kilometres east of the capital Kathmandu.





There Srijana Pyakurel, psychosocial first aid worker and her team mobilized other women leaders of the community, brought BK to a safe house run by the Women and Children's Office and filed a police complaint at a local station to bring BK's father to prison.

According to Ms. Pyakurel, BK was experiencing double trauma: the feeling of helplessness and homelessness since the earthquake and having been abused by her father almost all of her life.

Now calm in the safe house, BK says that what has helped her most is the care of the professionals trained in psychosocial aid with whom she can talk to about her trauma.

Even though she continues to receive threats from her father's friends in the community, BK has found her voice and strength. She wants to go back to her village and help other women in her community. "I never finished school, I want to figure out a way to go back home and help women who are in my position, tell them that they're not alone and that help is there if they need it."



MAALI GURUNG, GORKHA

HEALING IN POST-EARTHQUAKE NEPAL

“I still have debts to pay for all the goods that were buried by the earthquake... It is my responsibility; I will find a way to earn money and pay it off ”

Gorkha, Nepal—Sixty-two-year-old Maali Gurung recalls going to get some water in the tap next to her hotel on 25 April 2015. “It started shaking violently, then I fell and my body hit the ground very hard,” she says. She couldn’t move, and she watched in horror as her hotel turned into rubble within seconds. Unable to get away from whatever she was buried under, she heard people yelling and running away. “I tried to yell, but no sound came, the dust burned my eyes, I couldn’t see...then I passed out,” she says.

Almost a year since that fateful day, Ms. Gurung is sitting on the carpeted floor in the meeting room of Women for Human Rights (WHR), UN Women’s local partner that supports single Nepali women. She recounts the horror of the day when a 7.8-magnitude earthquake rocked central Nepal. She speaks slowly, recalling everything that happened that day.

When Ms. Gurung regained consciousness, she was still lying on the ground, unable to move. “I was under a huge pillar and had badly hurt my feet,” she says. The pillar was so heavy, she thought she was going to be crushed by it. When she lifted her head to look around, she saw her husband trapped in the rubble not so far away. “I kept calling him, as loud as I could, but he was already dead.”

She and her husband used to run a hotel in Hawa Danda, 150 kilometres from the capital, Kathmandu, a settlement on a rough overhanging rock en route to the Manaslu Tsum Valley. April is a busy time of the year for businesses as trekkers through the narrow trails to Manaslu.

On the day of the earthquake, Ms. Gurung’s hotel had a handful of guests. “Some were eating snacks, some were enjoying cold drinks—there was a lot of activity and a lot of noise,” she says.

When she gained consciousness everything was quiet. All she could hear was her own breathing. Ms. Gurung realized she was bleeding heavily from her injured foot but couldn’t get up to stop the bleeding. “I just lay there hoping someone would help me, but nobody came.”

Help didn’t arrive until the fourth day. For five days and four nights Ms. Gurung was in and out of consciousness. “I was thirsty, I wished it would rain so I could drink that water,” she says. On the morning of the fifth day her neighbours had come to check on their relatives, and found her alive. They carried her to Soti Bajar, some three hours away from Hawa Danda, through debris and dry landslides that were falling from the hills. They put her in a helicopter and sent her to the district headquarters, Gorkha Bajar, for treatment.

When doctors examined Ms. Gurung, her foot wound already had myiasis [a parasitic infection] because it hadn’t been treated in time. It needed to be kept clean, which she couldn’t do herself. She would need someone to help.





Her son had left to work in Malaysia eight years ago and has been estranged from her family. She and her husband had a little money saved, but that was also lost during the earthquake. “I thought: I have a son who never calls and a husband who is dead. I don’t have a house, no money, and now I can’t even move... who would want to take care of me? ... I had never felt this alone in my life.”

Her neighbour and WHR social mobilizer Suk Maya Gurung was her saviour. When Ms. Gurung was discharged from the hospital, Suk Maya brought her to the multipurpose women’s centre that WHR had set up in GorkhaBajar, with support from UN Women Nepal. Through the centre, survivors of the earthquake have been getting trauma counselling, psychosocial support, skills training, legal and life-saving information.

At the multipurpose centre, Ms. Gurung was fed, she could rest and she could heal. “I would’ve been dead, had it not been for those who took care of me after I was released from the hospital,” she says. She stayed there for over three months before she could walk properly.

When she could walk with a cane, she decided to go back to Hawa Danda to see what she could find. “There was only dust left,” she recalls. She couldn’t bear to be there, so she returned to Gorkha a few days later. A couple of months later, as she grew stronger, she returned. Her neighbours helped her make a small tin shelter. People in the village gave her a few meals to eat.

A few weeks ago, Ms. Gurung took part in a cash-for-work programme where she helped clear earthquake debris so she could bring home some rice. “I still have debts to pay for all the goods that were buried by the earthquake... It is my responsibility; I will find a way to earn money and pay it off,” she says.



LAXMI TAMANG, NUWAKOTA

REVOLUTIONARY WOMAN

Nuwakot NEPAL—Laxmi Tamang, 27, left home when she was 13 years old to join the Maoist army because she wanted to fight the injustice that her parents had to face when they could not pay off their agriculture loan.

Born in the village of Saramthali, in Rasuwa district, some 100km from the capital Kathmandu to a family of farmers, her parents have to abandon agriculture because they couldn't make a living and support Laxmi family. "My parents couldn't pay the agriculture loan they took and they had to work as daily wage earners to raise us," says Laxmi as she sits on the bed in her dark cramped room on a sunny summer afternoon.

In 2001, when she had just turned 13, the Maoist party workers had come to her school to perform. "They danced, they sang and they gave long passionate speeches about equality and revolution, I knew I had to join them if I wanted to fix what was wrong in my society," says Laxmi. The decade long Maoist war between the government and Maoist party ended in 2006 and left over 16,000 dead.

Laxmi knew some of the Maoist party workers. She convinced her parents that the path to revolution was the right path for her, and left home. "It was difficult in the beginning," she says adding, "We had to walk from village to village, we were giving guerrilla training, I know how to load rifle and shoot."

At 16, she met another soldier and decided to get married. "He was the same age as I was, but he was from a different caste—my days with him were the most wonderful days of my life," Laxmi says. However, tragedy struck a year later. Her husband was disappeared by the Nepal Army for months, tortured and killed in custody. "I lost everything," says Laxmi.

In 2006, a year after her husband was killed, the war ended and as a part of the peace process, Laxmi was sent to live in a United Nations monitored cantonment. Later, the Maoist party pulled her out from the cantonment to work in the party's youth wing—the Young Communist League. She returned to her village and started working as an YCL member. "Our job was to go from door to door and talk to the villagers, tell them about the work we were doing and recruit those who wanted to join the party."

"I don't want to be dependent on my husband or in-laws, it is good to stand your own two feet "

Four years after she returned from war, under pressure from her family and society, Laxmi married someone who was chosen for her by her community. "I was tired of being alone, I wanted companionship and support," explains Laxmi. However, life had other plans for her. Her second husband left to go abroad to work a migrant worker, and Laxmi had to stay back and play the traditional role of a daughter-in-law in his house. "My in-laws started to mentally torture me, they didn't approve that I was an ex-combatant, that I was still involved in the Maoist party," says Laxmi. Whenever her husband used to be back from his work abroad, he also used to torture her and hit her.

Laxmi had given birth to a daughter a year after her second marriage. Apart from a few phone calls, the father hasn't been a part of her daughter's life. When the 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit central Nepal on April 2015, Laxmi was living in the district of Nuwakot at her in-laws. "The house was destroyed, there wasn't enough space and my daughter and I had nowhere to go," says Laxmi.

Fortunately, UN Women's partner organization in Nuwakot district, Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), had set up a multipurpose women's centre as part of the humanitarian response to the earthquake. The multipurpose women's centre provides trauma counselling, dignity kits, solar lamps, information, referrals, carry out women's safety audits and facilitate early recovery and livelihood activities. "I was employed to help around the office, make tea, run errands, clean up—it was a huge support at a time of crisis because my daughter and I could also live at the centre," says Laxmi. When she got the job, she left the house at her in-laws and decided to live on her own.





When her contract ran out with WOREC a few months back, Laxmi knew she had to figure something out for her and her daughter. At her in-laws' her husband was back from Qatar for holidays and had remarried another woman. She knew she could never go back there again. When she was working at WOREC, she had spent a long time with the counsellor and was feeling better mentally to move ahead. "The counsellor had advised me to make peace with the past and look to the future, which is what I planned to do."

Laxmi saved money from her job at WOREC, took a Rs 90,000 (US\$900) loan from a local cooperative and started a lassi, tea and bakery store in the middle of Bidur, the district headquarters of Nuwakot district. Business was slow in the beginning, but is picking up picking up in the summer. On a good day Laxmi's store gets up to 30 customers and she has been making her loan payments regularly. Her five-year-old daughter is doing well in school, and she has also asked her mother to join her. "I don't want to be dependent on my husband or in-laws, it is good to stand your own two feet," says Laxmi.

When her husband is back the next time, she is going to the courts and filing papers for separation and custody of her daughter. "My future is my daughter, I want to give her education and strength so she will never have to face what I did," says Laxmi, "We only have each other now, and I will make sure my daughter gets all she deserves."



HIRA SIGDEL, NUWAKOT

SURVIVING THE ODDS

Hira hopes to live her days in peace, making whatever little she has, and helping women in her village who, like her, have been rejected by their families and need support.

Nuwakot, NEPAL— Hira Devi Sigdel, 55, has just wrapped up a meeting with a women’s group that she has helped start in her village. Ten women from the neighbourhood get together every week and discuss issues that concern women in the village, catch up on their activities and finances. “We also try to find women in our village who need financial and other kinds of assistance” says Hira as she sits in the courtyard of her house in Charghare village, Nuwakot district, cracked by the April 2015 earthquake.

Hira has always wanted to help women who are without support systems, because she herself is a survivor of gender violence and discrimination. Married at the young age of nine to a 30-year-old man, she was deprived of education and opportunities. “Marrying a girl off young was the culture in our villages at that time,” she explains.

When she turned 12, her husband re-married, and Hira was forced to leave him. She had lived with her parents for several years, when one day Hira was invited back to her husband’s. “His wife had just had children,” says Hira, “They didn’t ask me to come back because they loved me, they needed extra pair of hands to do housework, I couldn’t survive there.” Yet, she spent three years, until she could not bear and decided to move in with her parents again.

At her parents’ her father gave her a piece of land she could call her own. She planted crops and vegetables. Additionally, Hira learned to make baskets, which she could sell for money. She had saved up enough to build a house, when her husband came back to her, begged her for forgiveness and asked her to return. “He said he was sorry for not treating me well, he told me that I could get a part of his property, and that he wanted to give what was rightfully mine,” says Hira.

Hira left with her husband, but when she reached his house, her husband started treating her badly, yet again. He wanted Hira’s savings and refused to give her the property that was owed to her. “I left his house for the third time, never wanting to go back there again,” Hira says.



Hira has always had keen interest in news. She can barely read the newspaper, but she listens to the radio everyday. One day, she heard a public service announcement about how women who were abandoned by their husbands can file a case for property. She went to town, met with the right people and filed a case against her husband, which she eventually won. “I fought against his injustice, and won a piece of land,” says Hira.

However, apart from that victory in the courts, Hira didn’t have much to look forward to. When she returned to her parents for the third time, her father refused to take her back. He took the piece of land he had given her away from her. She sought help from her brothers, who let her build a small house in a piece of land close to their homes. “This house,” says Hira pointing to the mud and mortar structure cracked in many places, “I built with my own two hands.”

When the 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit central Nepal on April last year, Hira was in the neighbouring village helping out at a wedding party. “When I came home that evening, all the houses in the neighbourhood had collapsed, the roof of my house caved in and there were cracks all over,” says Hira.

She spent the monsoon in the goat shed. In October, she fixed the roof of her house, and decided to move in again. “There are cracks on the wall, it is probably not safe to live there, but I couldn’t spend the winter in the goat shed,” she says. More than a year since the quake, Hira has no idea how she will rebuild her house.

Hira’s has lived in the village all her life and knows everyone who passes through. Social mobilizer at UN Women, Nepal’s partner organization, Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal Manisha Thapa, passed by Hira’s village often. Hira reached out to Manisha after the earthquake, because she wanted to see if there were organizations helping women in need. “I inquired about the multipurpose women’s centre (MPWC)



that was set up in town, and went to visit them,” says Hira. As part of the humanitarian response to the earthquake, UN Women with its partner organizations set up MPWCs, which provide trauma counselling, dignity kits, solar lamps, information, referrals, carries out women’s safety audits and facilitates early recovery and livelihood activities

At MPWC, Hira learned about rights of single women. She was connected to engineers who surveyed her house for compensation, and mostly importantly, she got to spend time with other women who had been through tough times like she had and met with WOREC’s psychosocial counsellor. “The counsellor asked me all kinds of difficult questions, she made me open up and help me come to terms to a lot of emotions I had,” says Hira. “It was therapeutic to talk to her—she even made me write poems about my life.”

In her village, Hira encouraged more women to visit MPWC to get counselling, guidance or just to spend time with other women. Eventually, ten women came together and formed a women’s group that meets every week. The group also received ten goats as a part of livelihood support from WOREC.

The women of the group have also formed a cooperative where they deposit money every week. “When we find that a woman is in need, we give that money out as a loan so she can start something,” says Hira. The group is raising the goats and will give ten more women baby goats when they are born. “So the number of women who can raise goats and make a living will grow from 10 to 20 to 30....” says Hira.

Back at her cracked house in her village, Hira gets ready to feed the goats. She has six altogether and considers them her lifeline. “I am getting old, my body doesn’t allow me to till the land I have and farm crops, these goats are the way for me to survive,” she says. Hira hopes to live her days in peace, making whatever little she has, and helping women in her village who, like her, have been rejected by their families and need support.

NEPAL

EARTHQUAKE 2015



7.8 Magnitude
April 25, 2015
Barpark, Gorkha



7.3 Magnitude
May 12, 2015
Chilankha, Dolkha



Total Deaths
8969



Total Female Deaths
5026



Total Male Deaths
3934



Total Injured
22302



Total Female
Headed Households
201008



Total Male Headed
Households
572098



LIFE, ONE YEAR AFTER THE


EARTHQUAKE




BISHNU MAYA DANGAL, AGED 73, AND HER HUSBAND, 74, LOOKS ON THEIR TIN MADE TEMPORARY SHELTER IN SANOSIRUBARI VDC-6, CHAUTRA, SINDHUPALCHOWK, NEPAL. 06 MARCH 2016. THE COUPLE ARE LIVING IN A TEMPORARY SHELTER SINCE THE EARTHQUAKE AFTER THEY WERE ABANDONED BY THEIR SON AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.




Sunbeams trickle through little holes on the tin wall of her small hut. Dried corn cobs hang on the low tin ceiling, while corrugated sheets of tin partition the hut into a kitchen and a sitting area. A small dirty cupboard is on one side of the partition. On top of that is a clean new bucket. A makeshift wood stove burns more smoke than fire.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red shawl over a patterned purple and blue garment, is blowing on a fire in a traditional stone stove. The stove is built from large, dark stones and has a fire burning inside. A metal pot is placed on top of the stove. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.


This is home. Home for seventy-two year-old Bishnu Maya Dangal who is blowing to light up the fire for cooking. She coughs, takes a break and blows again. It is early spring in Sindhupalchowk, but it is still chilly outside. A few years ago, she and her husband had everything—a house, two sons, daughter-in-laws and healthy grandchildren. When her older son's kidneys started failing 20 years ago, Bishnu Maya donated one of hers. "The doctors said I could live with just one kidney ... how could I not give it to my son so he could live?" she recalls.

A group of people standing outdoors in a rural setting. In the center is an elderly woman wearing a red headscarf and a red patterned top. To her left is a woman in a red and white checkered top. To her right is a man in a black and blue jacket. Further right is a woman in a red floral top holding a young child. In the foreground, a young girl in a patterned top and pink pants stands. The background shows trees and a hillside.

They had 15 happy years together before her son's new kidney also started failing. "He passed away five years ago; he took my kidney and my love," says Bishnu Maya. Then, the family disintegrated as the younger son fought with his parents for property and the elderly couple divided the property between the families of the two sons. Soon after, the younger son took his share, moved his family to the capital Kathmandu and cut off all contact with his parents. The elderly couple adjusted to the new life.

A woman in traditional Nepali attire, including a white headscarf and a red patterned sweater, is sitting and talking to a woman in a leopard print top. They are both holding metal cups. The background shows a thatched roof and some items hanging on the wall.

That is where the elderly couple found the support they needed. Fortunately for them, the women's organization SAATHI, had located their multi-purpose women's centre, supported by UN Women and in coordination with the Government of Nepal, on the same premises of the district health post, where the Dangals landed. The multi-purpose women's centres function in five locations, and provide trauma counselling, information, legal and medical referrals. Centre staff asked the district health post to allow the couple to stay on the premises until they could return home.

An elderly woman in traditional Nepali attire, including a white headscarf and a red patterned sweater, is smiling and holding a senior citizens card. Next to her, an elderly man in a grey jacket is also smiling and holding a similar card. The cards have Nepali text and photos of the couple.

When Prativa Shrestha, the district coordinator of the multi-purpose women's centre in Sindhupalchowk, learned that the couple didn't have senior citizens cards, and weren't getting the money the Government provides to seniors, she leaped into action. She contacted the local administration, filed the necessary forms, got all the signatures and copies of citizenship and applied for the cards on the couple's behalf. Within days the cards were ready! Since then the couple has been getting Rs 500 (USD 5) each, every month. That's not much, but enough to buy basic supplies like sugar, salt, oil and medicine.

With the help of the Centre, the couple is managing—for now. The couple's only other source of income is raising goats, and selling them once they are big enough to bring them a good price.



Every day, come early afternoon, the Dangals take a walk back to the spot where their house used to be before the earthquake: today a cherry blossom tree is in full bloom next to a pile of rubble. "This is where our house used to be," says Bishnu Maya, who is unable to rebuild because they don't have enough money. But hope lives on. One day Bishnu Maya is hopeful she will be able to go back to her old life, her home, and bring her family together again.



UN Women Humanitarian Response to the Earthquake (April - December 2015)

NFI's

Women received Dignity Kits
6513

Women received Radio sets
2500

Women received solar lanterns
8094

Services

Women received psychosocial support
1532

Women benefitted from cash for work
163

Women benefitted from referral services
931

Information


Women received awareness raising information
2562

Women benefitted information centre
8841




STATE OF A MOTHER AFTER THE
EARTHQUAKE





GORKHA – LAXMI RECALLS THE DAY THE MIGHTY EARTHQUAKE SHOOK HER LIFE. SHE TALKS ABOUT HOW SHE AND HER 4 YEAR OLD SON ESCAPED FROM A COLLAPSING HOUSE IN HER VILLAGE. THE MEMORY OF THIS EVENT STILL HAUNTS HER EVERY DAY.



She is expecting another child and is eight months pregnant. She is all by herself in Gorkha bazar seeking for support. Her husband stayed back in the village for work. Doctors have told her that she needs utter health care as her delivery dates are nearing.



Laxmi's hands are filled with house chores and taking care of her son. Her son suffers from asthma and his condition has become worse after the earthquake, He needs constant care. She receives meagre financial help from her husband. It is very difficult for her to manage the household expenses through the money she receives from her husband. She used to work as a manual labor lifting gravels and sand but that has changed since she is pregnant now.



Laxmi lives in this house now. The house has a collapsed staircase and some walls contain cracks from the earthquake. It is still an unsafe place to stay for a pregnant woman and a child. With numerous aftershocks of the major quake still taking place, it is risky for both of them to continue residing in the above mentioned house. She has no other better options than to stay in this house as Gorkha bazar has been the post-earthquake hub for everyone residing in and around Gorkha.

Laxmi's son needs to visit health care center twice a week. He looks thin and weak. His health has become worse since the last earthquake. Laxmi finds it heartbreaking to be struggling alone in such situations and misses her husband's presence in these tough times.



Despite her struggles, she makes time to visit the Multi-Purpose Women Center in Gorkha. Laxmi learns about where she can reach for help and relief post-earthquake from the Center. Laxmi also learns about special care and relief package facilitated for pregnant women. She expresses that she has found it uplifting and has been motivated after joining the group.





Laxmi looks forward to a better future for her son and her unborn child. She aspires to acquire some skills and training and to use them to promote their living standard. She has woven a good picture for herself in the future. Her positivity and strength is admirable and inspiring.

UN Women work on Disaster Risk Reduction Preparedness and Resilience building (January 2016 - July 2016)

 Women benefitted from cash for work 151	 Women engaged in social groups 386
 Women received Psychosocial and Trauma assistance 479	 Women trainer on Disaster resilience 64
 Women benefitted from awareness raising information 3738	 Women received livelihood support and job counselling 364





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Cover Photo: Focusing Old Women hand, Sindhupalchowk, Nepal; UN Women/Narendra Shrestha

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