A report on
Invisible Earthquake Survivors of Kathmandu Valley

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Executive Summary:
Nepal faced two massive earthquakes on April 25 and May 12, 2015 and subsequent aftershocks for more than 4 months which caused thousands of death casualties and injuries. Hundreds of thousands of physical infrastructures were completely destroyed especially in 14 districts of, central, western and eastern Nepal.

After more than six months of devastation, Nepal is struggling towards normalcy through rebuilding and resettlement process. The government, non-government and international support to earthquake hit districts is highly appreciated for quick relief in the devastated areas during this state of emergency. Government has allocated budget from its emergency fund for carrying out the relief activities. Local youth and communities extended help and supported with distribution of relief materials.

The main objective of the assessment was to understand the impact of earthquake on marginalized, urban poor, and secluded communities of Kathmandu Valley. The major aspects of this assessment was to understand their living condition, livelihoods, health and education, government and non-government support, and different forms of violence with focus on women.

The assessment was conducted in different places of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used to assess the situation with mostly women in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur.

Most of the houses in the inner cities of the Valley were completely destroyed and/or uninhabitable. Most of the respondents were living in temporary shelters, *Guthi* houses (community house for religious and cultural activities), relative’s or rented houses; their living condition are getting worse which raised several issues relating to health, security and access to government services. Many of the valley dwellers were deprived of government and non-government support as large chunk of their support were distributed outside the valley as valley dwellers are perceived as well off and they do not need support. The reality of the survivors in the inner cities was very different; they did not get much support from either side.

Many of the respondents from inner cities of the valley are not able to receive government relief of Rs. 15,000 as immediate relief to build temporary shelters. Many of them do not have any idea of legal procedures getting government relief, their rights and other facilities provided to
earthquake survivors. On the other hand the focus of support activities have been for rural affected.
The effects of the earthquake are not limited to destruction of infrastructure, it had negatively impacted people's livelihood. Most of the respondents lost their primary source of income after the earthquake. Likewise, women and young girls had to face sexual harassment and domestic violence as they had to live in temporary shelters in group with congested spaces; they did not feel secure.
The Government is primarily responsible to provide emergency, support for recovery and reconstruction to bring people’s life to normalcy. The service delivery of local government agencies (ward offices) need to be service oriented especially during and post disaster period. They need to get connected with survivors to ensure the government reaches to all affected areas with relief and other services. But in the assessment we conducted we found major gaps in the communication and delivery of services by local government offices.
Thus, programs should be organized to raise awareness among the local people on their rights and responsibilities which will enable them to raise their voice with government agencies and demand for effective service delivery. Moreover, it will create linkage between local people and local government agencies. Similarly, livelihood programs should be provided to the survivors to revive their financial status. Protection measures should be strictly taken into account to prevent gender based violence and communicable diseases in community shelters.

**Background**
Nepal is located on two tectonic plates, the very plates, which collided to form the Himalayas. As a result it is extremely earthquake prone. The massive earthquakes in April 25 and May 12, 2015 and its subsequent aftershocks, has shattered most people, their homes, historical and religious sites; including World UNESCO Heritage sites, in the districts of the Central Development Region and mainly the Kathmandu Valley. The Government of Nepal (GoN) has categorized severely affected districts as 'A-Category', they are – Sindhupalchowk, Kathmandu, Nuwakot, Dhading, Rasuwa, Gorkha, Bhaktapur, Kavrepalanchowk, Lalitpur, Dolakha, Ramechhap, Makwanpur, Sindhuli, Okhaldhunga are the most effected districts, sequence based on the severity of the impact. (Emergency Operation Update, May 1-16, 2015, Nepal Red Cross
Society). 8,959 people have lost their lives and more than 22,322 were injured (Disaster Risk Reduction Portal, Government of Nepal¹). Most of the old settlements and heritage sites of the Kathmandu Valley have been severely damaged, from few houses to whole area destructions and many rendered uninhabitable.

Kathmandu is the second worst affected district after Sindhupalchowk, whereas Bhaktapur and Lalitpur stand seventh and ninth in the list of casualties and destruction. The total number of houses fully or partially destroyed reached 99,331 in Kathmandu, 28,010 in Bhaktapur and 25,943 in Lalitpur by August 2015 and has continued to grow due to numerous aftershocks. Deaths and injuries amounted to 1,229 and 7,950 in Kathmandu, 333 and 2,101 in Bhaktapur and 180 and 3,051 in Lalitpur by August 2015 (Disaster Risk Reduction Portal, Government of Nepal²). However, Government and non-government agencies focused their relief distribution, reconstruction and resettlement outside the valley. Most of tarps and other emergency relief were distributed and temporary shelters and community shelters were built in different places outside the valley. The valley has been mostly overlooked; especially as a result of the wide assumption that the people of the capital and inner cities are wealthy even though they are in serious need of immediate support. 350,676 people from Kathmandu 124,238 from Bhaktapur and 95,407 people from Lalitpur are in need of help (Nepal Flash Appeal, 2015³). The survivors from the valley received nominal support from government and non-government agencies.

People are still living in temporary shelters, Guthi⁴, makeshift tents along roadsides, or in their relative’s homes. Many of them have been unable to leave their tattered and battered houses located in courtyards or Bahals⁵. They are still living in houses with red stickers⁶ as they have no alternative and cannot afford to pay rent in a safer house; these houses may collapse at any minute due to aftershocks. These people need immediate temporary shelter/safety/security and income sources for survival.

⁴ Guthi is a form of institutional landownership, the religious and charitable aspects of which have given rise to special problems and characteristics in the fields of land tenure and taxation
⁵ Bahal (Nepal Bhasa: बहाल) is a type of courtyard found amongst Newar communities in Nepal
⁶ Red stickers are given to houses which are deemed uninhabitable
Objectives of the Assessment
The main objective of the assessment was to understand the impact of earthquake on marginalized, urban poor, and secluded communities of Kathmandu Valley. The major aspects of this assessment was to understand their living condition, livelihoods, health and education, government and non-government support, different forms of violence with focus on women, and linkages between local people and government agencies (especially ward offices).

Methodology
The study was purely based on the field observations and the interviews conducted with the most affected and marginalized people within the Valley. The study was conducted with qualitative approach; fieldwork was conducted from August 5-20, 2015. During this period researchers visited and observed various earthquake affected locations within Kathmandu Valley. In-depth interviews conducted with the survivors. Focus group discussions were conducted in different areas to reach larger groups to understand their problems and difficulties.

The Assessment was conducted in following locations of Kathmandu valley:
- Kathmandu: Ombahal, Bhinsensthan, Lakheymani, Wonde, Hyumata, Chunikhel
- Bhaktapur: Kamalbinayak, Yashikhya
- Lalitpur: Lubhu, Khachhey, Nakabahil, Bhinchen Bahal, Badikhel

Sampling method: The sampling was done through purposive sampling method and fieldwork was conducted in most affected areas of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur with marginalized people.

Primary Data Collection
- Direct Observation: The data were collected through observation. Thus, the report is influenced and based on observation of the vicinity. The main objective of the observation was to observe the living condition of the survivors and surrounding.

- In-depth interviews: A set of open ended questions was prepared for the household survey and we conducted individual interviews with the earthquake survivors based on the questionnaires. Primary data were collected from this method.
Focus group discussion: We conducted focus group discussion with the women of the study area.

Findings

Housing situation
Houses of most of the respondents were completely destroyed due to the earthquake and people are still living in temporary shelters: tents/Guthi houses/relative's home/rented properties/community schools. Binod Kumar Bajracharya, member of Disaster Management Committee in Bhinchebahal said, "About 50% of houses have been destroyed here in Bhinchebahal forcing people to live in tents/ Guthis/ rented house or relative's home." Similar is the case for most of the areas surveyed. Living in relative's house has made them feel dependent on their relative and felt they have overstayed their welcome. Similarly, the living condition of people in temporary shelters is getting worse due to the rainy season and overcrowding, which has increased exposure to diseases as many of them are getting sick. Furthermore, people are getting on each other's nerves and flaring into conflicts.

Those houses which are not already destroyed are on the verge of collapsing, according to the respondents. The Government Inspection Teams were not able to conduct thorough inspection and categorize whether the houses are inhabitable or not. Due to this reason many assessments were inadequate and many houses which were uninhabitable did not receive red stickers. People were unaware that they can register themselves as needing assistance in such circumstances. There were many cases where families could not receive government relief due to lack of legal documentation as separate nuclear families. The families which have registered themselves as separate households in their ward offices only can receive the government relief for each family. Similarly, most of the respondents were completely unaware about the registration procedures and government relief distribution procedures. Due to continuous aftershocks and knocking down buildings, houses that initially did not receive red stickers have become uninhabitable. Moreover, many houses in the Kathmandu valley are built connected to each other. This created a serious issue; if one collapses it causes a domino effect and pull down many houses in the area. Thus, cannot demolish their unless the neighbors can afford to do it too.
Debris
Debris is a crucial issue both to demolish and reconstruct a house. Gyanbahadur Rajthala, Lubhu, Lalitpur said, "Despite having red stickers on my house, I am unable to start reconstruction because the process of removing the debris is expensive." Similarly, Tara Devi Ranjit, Lakhenani, Kathmandu said, “The location of my house makes it difficult to remove debris. No laborer agrees to remove them besides being extremely expensive." This is a problem for many as it blocks access to pedestrians and any transportation. The removal of debris is expensive and difficult especially disposal from inner courtyards is a huge problem as it has to be manually carried through many courtyards to nearest truck accessible space for further disposal. There is need for coordination between local government and traffic police too. Due to these complex situations many houses with red stickers are yet to be demolished.

Health
Earthquake survivors are compelled to live in tents and open field which potentially increase the exposure to various communicable and other diseases. For one thing people are living in close proximity to each other. This has increased the possibility of spreading diseases, especially in the younger population. A young woman, Sabrina Shakya from Nakabahil, Lalitpur said that it was difficult to stay in crowds surrounded by sick people. They feared they would get caught by diseases. Moreover, mismanagement of defecation site has made it impossible to live in temporary shelters. There are no proper sanitation systems. Respondents from Lubhu, Lalitpur mentioned that due to monsoon, mostly the children were vulnerable to fall sick as they are living in the tents in field. Many children were suffering from mental trauma and shell shock after the earthquake. Nanchori Shakya of Nakabahil, Lalitpur said, "My younger son (age 4) wakes up in the middle of the night and tries to run away due to fear of more earthquakes." With destruction of physical infrastructure, natural disasters can lead health hazards and outbreaks of infectious disease.

Minimum reach out and inadequate Government Support
Ministry of Information and Communications announced Cabinet’s endorsement of a short-term relief package which included Rs. 15,000 grant for people to build temporary shelter before monsoon season. Furthermore, the government decided to provide a total of  Rs. 200,000 (15,000+185,000) for families whose house had been completely destroyed and Rs. 25,000 for
those who want to repair their damaged houses. The affected people can also apply for a bank loan at 2% interest rate to rebuild or repair their damaged houses. The government provided an identity card for survivors of the earthquake, on the basis of the card the survivor will be provided with relief. Most of the respondent were provided with the identity card and was given Rs. 15,000. However, the survivors of Bhinchebahal are yet to receive the amount and are in the request process. There was very little reach out and people friendly explanations provided to the survivors on the earthquake relief process. A respondent from Lubhu said that they hardly received any relief from the Government except one bowl of rice for each member of a family, once. They relied on non-government agencies for food as the government supply was very little. Support is provided to groups or places which are ‘visible’ – recognized as shelters for large numbers of people (for example: Tundikhel in Kathmandu and Yashinkhya and Karyabinayak in Bhaktapur). Most of the indigenous people from core Kathmandu never went to Tundikhel. Throughout the inner cities there is a lack of concern from the government was seriously felt by the women.

Impact on livelihood
The effects of the earthquake are not limited to destruction of infrastructure, it has negatively and seriously impacted people's livelihood. Respondents made complaints that they have lost their primary and only source of income. In Lubhu, Lalitpur, for example, most people are dependent on making yeast (Marcha) that is required for fermentation of wine and alcohol. This was made seasonally and sold throughout the year. Yeast production requires a certain temperature, which was achieved in their old houses. Due to the destruction of their houses, they have lost their only source of income. Chaitya Raj Bajracharya from Bhinchebahal, Lalitpur grieved, “I have lost everything, my house and income and I am the only source of income for my family. I have a mentally disabled daughter and I don’t know how I will take care of all of them. I used to work as a stone carver but now all raw materials are buried under my destroyed house.” Many of the marginalized/widows/elderly respondents, who relied on meager income generated through renting out rooms of their old houses, have lost their only source of income. Tara Devi Ranjit,
aged 58 years from Lakhenani, Kathmandu, a widow living with her 15 year old son said, “My husband used to be an accountant but after he passed away, the monthly rental from our house was the only source of income. My house is destroyed, my only source of income. I earn a little by sewing petticoat and traditional Dhaka shawl for which I get paid Rs. 5 and 10 per piece respectively. I don’t know how I will take care of my son and myself.”

In Badikhel, Lalitpur many of the respondents used to depend on bamboo household items. After the earthquake, they find it very difficult to continue their occupation due to lack of bamboos (raw materials); most of the bamboos were cut down for reconstruction of temporary shelters. Likewise, most of the respondents from Chunikhel, Kathmandu have no other options than live in temporary shelters. They depended on daily wage labor as they do not own the land.

**Women**

Most of the women interviewed were used to stay indoors. Due to which they are too shy to leave their homes, shelter or communities to enquire about relief distribution with the government officials. Most of them were only used to communicate with their immediate relatives and had no reasons to reach out to others prior to the earthquakes; as a result they find it difficult to talk to anyone beyond their family members. This has made the women unaware of their rights, what they are entitled to or how the government system works. There is lack of linkage between women and the local government agencies especially due to lack of information of the government system and process, their rights, and being part of public space. Most of the women interviewed were illiterate making it difficult for them to possess marketable skills and be able to support their families. They regret for not giving education the prior importance when they were young. They believe that if they had continued their education, they would be able to financially support their family. They realized the importance of education due to earthquake, learning any skill is difficult without it.

**Senior citizens**

Along with women many of the senior citizens felt helpless especially after the earthquake. They have no support mechanism after their traditional system broke down with the earthquake especially those who do not have children to support them (due to death or they are too busy dealing with their own earthquake impacts). Most of the elderly are separated from their family and are living in temporary shelters with other elder population while some of their sons or
daughters are living elsewhere for the security of their own daughters; others have were taking care of their own destroyed homes. They were devastated and hopeless to be relying on relief for food and the inability to do any income generating work due to their old age.

**Sexual harassment and domestic violence**
Incidents of sexual harassment and abuse have gravely increased post earthquake. Most families in tents were living separately in rented spaces, as families consider it unsafe for the younger females to stay with them in the open spaces. Maiya Bajracharya of Bhinchebahal said, “I am staying here with the elder population in this Guthi and my son with his wife and two young granddaughters have rented a place nearby as we feel it is unsafe for my granddaughters to stay here with me due to the fear of sexual harassment.”

Women are facing domestic violence due to increased consumption of alcohol by the male members in the family. Woman from Wonde and Hyumate shared about their husbands increasing alcohol consumption due loss of property and job.

Rasmila Shahi of Hyumata said, "I lost my mother-in-law while she was protecting my niece during earthquake due to this my husband has been traumatized for the loss of his mother, house and job leading him to consume alcohol." Rashmila is very sad to her husband’s condition. When she tells her husband not to consume alcohol she gets beaten or threatened to leave the house. He used to work abroad but returned due to earthquake, the government did not allow anyone to work in foreign labor market as there was lack of laborers locally especially during this time.

**Wealth perception**
People in general believe that valley dwellers are well off. Moreover, in certain areas where there is mixture of people ranging from rich to poor, the marginalized people face the difficulty of being perceived as wealthy and not in need of support. They are seen as having enough to sustain their life but those who require support are invisible in the eyes of the government and organizations. However, they are in desperate need of it. Purnima Shakya of Nakabahil, Lalitpur
said, “We are living in a community with both rich and poor people. The wealthy people themselves went to distribute relief packages in various villages but didn’t give any in their own locality. They assumed that all of us from this community need no help and that we are self sustained, but we are not.” There are tons of urban poor in the Valley who are barely able to sustain their lives. The government has continued to overlook these urban poor families who do not live in slums but still fall under the poverty line. Conditions of people who have houses or live in rented places are worse off than those living in the slums especially in the earthquake context. Many have difficulty to get one square meal a day who were not getting external help.

**Education**

School fees have not changed since the earthquake and have become unaffordable to most people affected by earthquake, due to a lack of income sources. Some of the students have had to give up their dream for professional degree/higher education as the parents are not able to afford it. Moreover small and joint families are living in a tent, adjusting to tent-life; some students have lost interest in studying. This is the case with many families. Sabrina Shakya said, “I cannot concentrate in my studies as everyone is in the same room. It’s not only me all the student has to face the same problem. There is no privacy or space for us to study effectively”.
Case Stories:

1. Elderly women

Tara Devi Ranjit, aged 58 from Lakhenani, Kathmandu, is a widow living with her 15 year old son. Her house was her only source of income through which she received enough for her son's education and fulfilling their basic needs. Her husband was an accountant but after his death she started sewing small items (petticoat and traditional Dhaka shawls). After the earthquake, she not only lost her home and security but also her only source of steady income (although very small) that was her house. Moreover due to her old age she cannot sew like she used to before. She used to earn about Rs. 5-10 per piece through sewing. She has been staying with her brother's family for last three months but feels as if she is being a burden to them. Although she has received the Rs. 15,000 from the Government, the location of her house is in a difficult place. The laborers do not agree to clear the debris. She has not received any emergency relief support from non-government, furthermore, the food supply shop she took credit from are pursuing her to payback the dues. She never came out of her house after she got married. She was always shy; she does not have any idea about how to receive government support in her conditions and how to support her family herself any longer. She wants to work but she feels she is too old to continue sewing as her eyes are getting weak and does not know any other skills. She wants her son to work but feels he is too young to get a job and should concentrate more on his studies.
2. No source of income

The story of Ratna Devi Manandhar from Kamal Binayak, Bhaktapur paints a clear picture of the circumstances in which many people have found themselves after the earthquake. She is an elderly woman who has lost both of her sons before earthquake. Due to severe health problems, she therefore has to rely on her daughter-in-laws for economic support. Unfortunately, they are uneducated, and knitting is the only skill they have. They earn Rs. 5 for knitting a hat. This amount is next to impossible to support a combined family of seven.

Before the earthquake they had difficulty to make ends meet but they don’t even have home. Their situation has worsened as their only property, their home, has completely collapsed. Two of her grandsons are studying in primary school and other two are in high school. She poured her grief in her inability to educate her grandchildren for the higher education as they have nothing left. They were living in a tent in Kamal Binayak.
3. Children Affected

Nani Chhori Shakya, a 49 years old housewife from Nakabahil, Lalitpur lives with her husband and 3 children. Her house was completely destroyed by the earthquake and it is no more livable. She is currently living in a guthi house in her neighbourhood along with 3 other families. The guthi house is a place where cultural and traditional activities/events are conducted and religious and antique items are stored. As it belongs to the community, they got the permission to stay in the house for a year. She is worried about finding a new place for rent as the price of rent has risen higher after earthquake. Her husband is a handicraft artist who makes various copper utensils. Due to downturn on business, there has not been much income in the business. Her elder daughter is 22 years old and is working part time as an intern in a cooperative bank with monthly allowance of Rs. 2000. Her younger daughter who has completed her higher secondary education is in search of college for further studies. Nani Chhori is worried about her children's education because she says the current family income is not sufficient for the family's basic needs. It is difficult for her to pay college fee for her children’s education. One of her daughters has gone silent ever since the earthquake, she used to be quite bubbly but now she stays quiet most of the time. They share the house with 3 other families. Each family has 2 bedrooms and a kitchen. Due to overcrowding and noise, her daughters are not getting the privacy they require to concentrate on their studies. She is currently helping her husband in the handicraft business.

4. Lack of Cooperation from Local Government

Sabita Kapali, 27 years, highly educated, unmarried and supporting her family of five. She experienced huge loss from the devastating earthquake which killed her younger brother and uncle and the five story house was left in rubbles. Her mother was seriously injured. She submitted her case both to the police and ward office of the human and home loss in earthquake to get the relief. Unfortunately, the police lost the application and the evidences. But they worked together to straighten out the problem. Her house and ward office were next to each other but the ward secretary did not give her earthquake victim card. He was delaying the process. He seemed to be least bothered to about her grief. She was able to get her card five months after the earthquake. She was not able to get government relief packages apart from funeral support.
5. Laxmi Shahi-Kanga, Basantapur

Laxmi Shahi, 58 years old single mother, a local resident of Kanga, Basantapur lives with her son, daughter-in-law and grandson. Their house was completely collapsed and currently they are living in temporary shelter in Shanti Niketan School. Now, the school management has asked to find other place to stay but they cannot afford to rent a new place.

Her son works in an electronic shop and her daughter-in-law works as a sales girl in a computer shop. Their income is limited which is only sufficient for basic needs but not for renting a space to live in.

Laxmi Shahi does not have any working skills of income generating activities. They were well off when her husband was alive. He passed away only few months back. She is having hard time to think what she will be able to do to make ends meet. She is hoping the government will help her to build her house as soon as possible.
Recommendations:

1. The government should provide support for relief, recovery and reconstruction in the inner cities of the valley as they are not the focus of relief and reconstruction by I/NGOs or bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies. They should be provided with government relief packages and information on legal procedures. Moreover, they should be consulted in the rebuild/reconstruction to formulate the relevant policies and implementation of programs for sustainability, ownership, and empowerment.

2. The living condition of survivors in temporary shelters and community houses is very wretched. They are under threat from the point of view of health, education, physical and sexual harassment. Hence, the government should immediately provide financial and other support for renovation, reconstruction and restitution.

3. There should be concrete plans to support survivors to revive their livelihoods as most of them have lost their family business or previous occupation.

4. Gender based violence is one issue which requires very specific measures for prevention and address the issues of survivors, which needs to be dealt at individual, community, local government and law enforcement agencies.

5. Programs should be developed concretely to increase understanding of local people on their rights and responsibilities so that they can raise their voices and issues at local government agencies (ward offices and municipalities) on their service delivery. This will create linkages between local people and the government agencies for future coordination.
Some Photographs from Assessment sites: