



# Communication with Communities

## Nepal Earthquake Response

Internews, Qualitative Assessment #1, Nuwakot

May 10, 2015

Collected by Viviane Lucia Fluck, with support from Tripura Oli  
Queries to [vfluck@internews.org](mailto:vfluck@internews.org)

**Disclaimer:**

This is the first report of an on-going series of field-level qualitative assessments. Please be mindful that these are snapshots of a very complex and chaotic situation on the ground and not necessarily as representative on their own.

**Summary:**

Focus group discussions and community interviews were conducted on May 10, 2015 in Betrawati camp, Nuwakot and with key informants from Kakani VDC, Nuwakot. Participants/key informants were mainly women between 19 and 61 years old and three male key informants (40 years, 43 years, 64 years). The main information is from the assessment in Betrawati camp and is complemented by input from key informants.

**Summary of findings:****Lack of access to information tools:**

- No or very limited access to electricity
- Very limited access to phones, almost no opportunities to charge phones
- Very limited ability/knowledge on how to use text messages
- None of the respondents had access to radio receivers
- There also did not seem to be any other kind of information material

**Unmet information and communication needs:**

- No information on what support is available, individuals are not able to make informed decisions for themselves which is causing great distress
- No or very limited knowledge how to contact media or relief organisations to ask for support or give feedback
- No information on distribution methodology, which is causing jealousy within the camp and towards other districts
- Because of a lack of information rumours are spreading and adding to the already heightened stress level

**Other barriers to two-way communication**

- Lack of inclusion of especially elderly women
- Language barrier within the camp and also between camp inhabitants and outsiders. Even some of the younger women and girls only spoke Tamang. But others in the camp only speak Nepali.

- The trauma suffered from losing homes and in some cases close family members makes individuals less vocal about their other concerns and thus further excludes them

#### Other unmet needs:

- The highest priority need is **shelter**, preferably tents but also tarps, especially the elderly and young mothers with infants suffer from living under tarps without any air circulation and muddy floors
- **WASH**, especially urgent is the need for toilet facilities
- **Health**, although there is a small clinic run by the Italian Civilian protection (in Betrawati) they are leaving in a week, individuals are concerned about diarrhoea (no reports of AWD as of yet)
- **Food** is not yet a major need, but is a concern for the coming month and time thereafter

## Methodology

Six focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in a tent camp in Betrawati, Nuwakot. Additionally two key informants from Kakani VDC, Nuwakot were interviewed. Moreover, short interactions with other camp inhabitants, and informal interview with the leader of the Italian department of civilian protection and observations added to the data. The assessment took place on May 10, 2015. Participants/key informants were mainly women between 19 and 61 years old and three male key informants (40 years, 43 years, 64 years). The main information in this report is from the assessment in Betrawati camp and is complemented by input from key informants. The Betrawati camp consists of 285 households of which 16 are single-headed-women households. Overall the impression was that the majority of camp inhabitants were female and we were told that a lot of the young men had migrated to India to find work<sup>1</sup>. A series of questions was prepared in order to act as a guide for covering communication and information gaps. These included:

- Access to information

---

<sup>1</sup> We are currently waiting for confirmation on precise numbers as to the gender

- Contact to humanitarian organisations
- Preferred feedback mechanism
- Information needs
- Communication Barriers
- Rumours

As respondents have all gone through significant amounts of stress, the assessment took care to not add an additional burden to them. In order to not add to 'survey fatigue' the assessment was done in a conversational manner inviting participants to share their views rather than intimidating them with long questionnaires. Interviews and focus group discussions were mainly conducted in Nepali. Two key interviews were conducted in English. A few respondents translated comments of their family members who only spoke Tamang. Respondents were picked randomly or through the local women's group. The goal was to especially get feedback from women and girls as for instance the first BBC Media Action report with data gathered from social media had 91% young male respondents. It must be noted that this assessment is of a qualitative nature and therefore cannot be easily compared with the BBC Media Action report. Instead the reports are to be seen as complimentary.

## Findings:

Throughout all group discussions and interviews the lack of information seemed almost absolute. Individuals did not know if they would receive any assistance and if yes of what nature that might be. Nobody knew which organisations are on the ground, who is doing what and which relief to expect. This put a lot of additional stress and concern on them. *'We don't know what's coming next'* was a sentence heard a lot during our community interviews. As one focus group of three women told us *'not having any information makes us feel lost'*. Throughout all groups and interviews individuals talked about their need for information on what will happen next, where they should go to and what support they can expect. The following sub sections will briefly explain different issues connected to communication gaps and give short recommendations after each sub section.



### **Lack of community cohesiveness through lack of information?**

Several respondents reported frustration and jealousy because of a lack of information on distribution methods. For instance two women (47 and 56 years old) questioned why Korean and Japanese aid organisations went to Rasuwar but did not help them. ***'I understand that they go there, but they should help here too!'***. There were similar frustrations among other respondents, who felt they were not clear on why some people were receiving aid and they did not. This frustration was not only turned towards people outside of the camp but also to people inside the camp. As the leader of the women's group explained, they had received a few tents. However the total was not enough to give one tent to each household, therefore they decided to not distribute the tents until they would receive more. This was clearly an issue, as having tents that people are in dire need of but not handing them out also put a lot of pressure on her. A 41 years old man was frustrated as he and his family had to live under a tent with no floor. ***He felt that it would be most fair if everybody would receive the same tent.*** Respondents who still had a damaged house next to the camp that they shared with several people also were frustrated that people in the camp were receiving relief while they were not. This lack of information on why some communities receive relief while others do not combined with a complete lack of information on what kind of support may come in the future clearly sparks controversy and jealousy within communities. If intensified this could lead to a lack of community cohesiveness, which would undermine mutual support within the community and could greatly add to more distress of the affected communities.

### **Recommendations:**

- Organisations and media should clearly inform about relief criteria and why it is at times not possible to give everybody the same amount or type of relief
- Media could support by fostering understanding of the similarly dire circumstances of other communities and explain why they need to receive relief more urgently

### **Communication methods:**

There was a strong preference for face-to-face communication. Although one focus group of women (19 years to 61 years) also acknowledged that it might not be feasible for organisations to send people out to talk to them on a regular basis.

Other respondents also felt that to give feedback they would prefer a face-to-face conversation. Reasons for this were, language barriers for Tamang speakers and illiteracy for most of the respondents. As an older woman explained in broken Nepali ***'I don't speak Nepali so I don't really talk to anybody much'***. This also points towards language being a barrier not just to outsiders but also to others in the camp. It could be assumed that this could also result in a lack of social support within the community. Only two 19 and one 20 years old girl, who all seemed to have a slightly higher level of income than the camp inhabitants, stated they would be comfortable to give feedback via text message. Some of the interviewees stated they would be happy to receive information through radio, though it must be noted that language barrier is a problem for a lot of the camp inhabitants who only speak Tamang (younger as well as older individuals). While men were very vocal and actively approached us to tell us their worries, many of the women were more timid and even after encouragement were shy to give their input.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure multi-language programming
- Tamang speaking community mobilisers
- Ensure that local journalists and assessors also seek the opinion of less vocal community members

#### **Rumours:**

The described information vacuum also contributed to the spreading of rumours. The main rumour that almost all groups mentioned was that another earthquake would come, which would be stronger than the first one. Understandably this was cause for anxiety. A 20 years old mother and her mother claimed that ***'we don't believe in the rumours as there was an earthquake announced for last Saturday but didn't happen. But it would be good to have confirmation'***. However, they still said they couldn't have peace of mind until they got more information on the rumour. This suggests that even if rumours are questioned doubt and fear remain. Another female group said that they would like to hear from an expert on the likelihood of another earthquake happening. Yet another rumour was that house owners would have to take photos of their property to

claim support for damages. One of the female focus groups shared a house and was asking us to take photos of the damages. This is concerning as it may present an opportunity for scams, such as random individuals asking for money to take photos 'necessary for claiming support' (a practice reported in other disasters<sup>2</sup>). Another rumour that one of the focus groups mentioned was that a company had agreed to build 100 houses in another village. The group wanted confirmation on this and was also questioning on what grounds the other village was selected. Another middle aged female respondent said she was getting information from her daughter in Kathmandu via phone. Nevertheless, she was not sure as to whether rumours she had heard were true or not. With the exception of one male key informant, who seemed well connected and was a business owner, **none of the respondents knew whom to turn to in order to verify or falsify rumours.** The lack of access to quality two-way programme of local media and any other kind of trusted information source poses a significant barrier to clarifying these rumours. These rumours are not to be underestimated, on the one hand they cause new anxiety and on the other hand they may hamper for instance disaster risk reduction or rebuilding efforts, as communities may be afraid to return to their home.

**Recommendation:**

- Making sure rumours are being tracked and taken seriously
- Ensuring access to a trusted information source that will address rumours
- Ensuring affected communities know about their rights

**Radio:**

The pre-quake listening to radio was varied throughout respondents. More respondents said they never or rarely listened, others stated they had listened to radio on a regular basis. However, from the respondents who did not listen to radio regularly or at all before the earthquake some said they would now listen to radio if they had the chance and if radio would provide useful information. The first barrier to radio is the lack of electricity and lack of radio receivers. Additionally, there are secondary barriers such as lack of locally focused content in different languages. One of the key informants told us that although he listened

---

<sup>2</sup> Wenchuan Earthquake

to radio, he felt **the station was only reporting on events that had happened rather than helping affected communities plan their future**. Another concern was that most of the Tamang content was entertainment focused rather than informative. Although some of the respondents did speak Nepali they also said that they were more confident and comfortable expressing themselves in Tamang. This suggests that individuals may be more likely to give feedback if they have the opportunity to do so in their own language.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Local radio is clearly needed, however content should be built around the questions and worries of the local population
- Useful information and answers to questions should be available in different languages
- Radio receivers are needed, especially in camps where there is no access to 'public' radios such as radios in shops etc.

#### **Other unmet needs:**

Although the assessment was on information and communication gaps respondents were eager to share their insight on what they needed most. This also served as a good indicator on what kind of information was needed most. The main need was shelter, as respondents were living under makeshift tents, which were extremely hot and didn't have any floor. Moreover, respondents were anxious about how they would live in this already insufficient shelter during monsoon season. Second on the list were toilets, which were missing completely from the camp. Respondents also mentioned worries about food as they had only received a food delivery once and had no information if there would be another one. It is noteworthy that the clinic at the camp will leave in a week. A fact of which none of the respondents seemed to be aware of and which will come as a disappointment since respondents were very appreciative of the services provided. Another concern was that the price for construction labourers had risen dramatically, which made it hard to impossible for the women's group organising the camp to hire workmen to build temporary shelter.